MURDER
STRIKES
AN
ATOMIC
UNIT

Theodora
Du BOIS

THE
CRIME
CLUB

80.150 / 51

MURDER STRIKES AN ATOMIC UNIT

HERE ARE MURDER and adventure with your old friends, the McNeills, accompanied by a fascinating picture of a small part of the work that was done on the development of the atomic bomb.

The mysterious appearance of several gifts of expensive jewelry quite astonished Anne McNeill until she was suddenly whisked away from her home by kidnapers and questioned on what she knew about U-235.

It all began when a university research unit began work on something so hush-hush and important that it became necessary to hire Dr. Jeffrey McNeill as official protector. Then, after Anne escaped from her kidnapers, she was made a member of the unit for her own safety. Perhaps this was fortunate, for the two investigators were together when one of the workers was murdered.

There could have been any number of motives for this murder—professional jealousy, frustrated amour, dread that the research of the murdered man would bring a horrible success to the work of the whole unit.

New England scene.

This novel has not been serialized in any form prior to book publication.

Books by
THEODORA DU BOIS

Mystery Stories

Armed with a New Terror
Death Wears a White Coat
Death Tears a Comic Strip
Death Dines Out
Death Comes to Tea
Death Is Late to Lunch
The McNeills Chase a Ghost
The Body Goes Round and Round
The Wild Duck Murders
The Case of the Perfumed Mouse
Death Sails in a High Wind
Murder Strikes an Atomic Unit

Stories for Young People

Diana's Feathers
Diana Can Do It
Banjo the Crow
Heroes in Plenty

MURDER STRIKES AN ATOMIC UNIT

THEODORA DU BOIS

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK
PUBLISHED FOR **THE CRIME CLUB**
BY DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC. 1946

COPYRIGHT, 1946
BY THEODORA DU BOIS
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

All of the characters in this book are entirely imaginary. Any resemblance to anyone living or dead is coincidental. The material about the atomic bomb is that which is now public knowledge.

T. Du Bois.

I wish to thank Dr. W. T. S. for technical medical help in MURDER STRIKES AN ATOMIC UNIT.

T. D. B.

CHARACTERS

Jeffrey McNeill	surgeon and research scientist by profession and choice, an investigator of crime by unfortunate ability
Anne McNeill	his wife
Michael	their small son
Mary	their indispensable and harried cook

Members of Dr. Julian's unit—all brilliant chemists

Dr. Julian	in his sixties, a kindly man, his life dedicated to science
Dr. Lajoie	unmarried, in his middle forties, a person of means, charm, and imagination
Hans Torgerson	a Norwegian refugee, thirty-five, quiet and sorrowful, a person of strength, in love with
Helen Haleck	twenty-nine or thirty, beautiful, experienced, interesting
Walter Dejon	twenty-nine, impulsive, volatile, not too happily married

The three young Ph.D.s	*Tom Morse*	twenty-seven, a Southern boy, tall, gaunt, and appealing, a descendant of a long line of evangelical preachers
	Sam Talbert	twenty-six, stocky, sandy-haired, crude, but sincere and generous, a "leftist," an internationalist, formerly engaged to Pauline Dunbar
	Ames Auger	brilliant and self-centered, now engaged to
	Pauline Dunbar	the young secretary of the unit, immature but with some sound ideas
	Mrs. Julian	Dr. Julian's wife
	Cynthia Dejon	Walter's wife
	Zunyer	A Spaniard
	Konrad	His young son
	Pierre	Zunyer's man
	Mr. Bard	Of the F.B.I.

MURDER STRIKES AN ATOMIC UNIT

I

THE RING was set with a ruby as large as a cherry pit surrounded by a circle of diamonds. There was no jeweler's name on its blue leather box; it had been mailed, noncommittally, in New York, and no card accompanied it. The weight of it, as I put it on my finger, made me feel shackled, and I had the uncomfortable fancy that an invisible but strong chain led from it to some circumstance that was strange and undesirable.

Jeffrey, who happens to be my husband, was away on a trip to Washington and Chicago and possibly also, he had said, to New Mexico. He had been unsatisfactory about the purpose of his going and unnaturally vague about where, in case of necessity, he might be reached. I had felt left out and a little hurt because since our marriage we had always done things together or at least shared an understanding of our projects. But ten days ago he had hurried off in an inexplicable mood of preoccupied excitement and had, I noticed, taken his pistol with him, although he had tried to slip it into his suitcase at a moment when he thought I was busy writing out checks.

I suppose when he arrived in New York he had been sorry for his brusqueness and remembered that our wedding anniversary was due sometime around now. He had probably rushed into a shop, picked out a gift—apparently with his eyes shut—and had it sent to me, forgetting the card. It was sweet of him and I appreciated it but thought that the money might have been more satisfactorily spent because the ring did not conform in the least to his usual taste or to mine.

The wedding anniversary came in five days. Two days after that the postman brought another small package. I unwrapped it, found another glossy white box, within that another blue box, and within that on a satin bed a pair of elaborate and flamboyant diamond clips. Now Jeffrey had been a reasonable but never a lavish bestower of presents. These expensive manifestations were disturbing. They seemed to indicate some psychological process beyond my comprehension. And what appalling sum could these things have cost? That, however, I should find out when the bank sent its statement on the first of July.

This was in the year 1942.

July came and the yellow envelope arrived from the bank. I looked first, as we all do, with apprehension at the figures at the end of the last sheet and was surprised at the unprecedentedly large balance. There were no considerable subtractions to be seen on the debit side, but there was, in the credit column, a deposit of two thousand dollars for which I couldn't account at all. Its laconic explanation was "Cash," which told nothing.

For an unpleasant moment I wondered if the ring and the clips and the cash deposit could be an oblique and embarrassing approach of someone other than Jeffrey. Walter Dejon had been constituting himself an emotional nuisance for months. But Walter, having only the rank of assistant professor in our university and, obviously, no outside sources of income, had no money to throw around on fabulous rings and clips for another man's wife, particularly since she had persistently trampled on every spark of his ardor whenever she saw it appear. Also he had a wife of his own who demanded ruby rings and diamond clips of life. If these tributes derived, fantastically, from him, he must be mad as a Bedlamite.

No, Jeffrey was obviously the kind but erratic donor. I sent a loving and appreciative letter to the forwarding address in Washington I had managed to pry out of him. Then I wrote our bank asking for an explanation of the two-thousand-dollar deposit. Before replies came, events broke in a storm of cyclonic scope.

I drove home from a Sunday night concert. I first took Helen Haleck and Hans Torgerson back to their respective rooms. Torgerson stood beneath a street lamp with the light shining on his thick gray hair. He looked a little tired, a little poor and foreign in the gray trousers and dark blue coat he usually wears. He thanked me for the lift home, with his attractive, grave courtesy. He was a brilliant research man, tall, rough-featured, sincere, and sad, a Norwegian of about thirty-five or so who had been over here lecturing when the Nazis invaded his country. He was unable to get back and had learned that his wife and young son had been killed.

He stood beneath the light, as I say, and thanked me for the lift. He said, "Good night, Helen," but instead of turning away and going up to the door of his lodging house he stood indecisively, looking at us with a disturbing expression, almost as if he were frightened or had suddenly found himself lost among unfamiliar and alarming surroundings. He stepped toward the car again and, ignoring me, said, "But if the world is destroyed, do we wish to be responsible—I say, *do* we? There is that to be considered."

She said, "Hans!" as one giving a warning.

He gave his head a quick shake and blinked his eyes. "I am sorry, Mrs. McNeill, forgive me," he said. "I speak foolishly. It was in reference to a quite hypothetical discussion Dr. Haleck and I have been having between the numbers at the concert. . . . I do thank you. Good night." He put his hand in the car, took up Helen Haleck's, and kissed it.

I saw her expression as she looked at him, and his eyes on hers, and I thought, "They are sea-deep in love with each other."

Then he turned and ran up the steps to the front door of the house where he lived.

I drove on and Helen Haleck said to me, "When is Jeffrey coming home, Anne?"

"I hope soon," I answered.

"Is it true that he is careening all over the country with a beautiful black-haired enchantress?"

I controlled the car's impulse to leap over the road onto the sidewalk and hit a tree.

I said, "I doubt it. Who said he was?"

"I'd better not tell you or you'll seek out the perpetrator with a horsewhip."

"I should, of course. . . . Who was it?"

She said, "Let it slide, Anne. It's immaterial. I wish he were home because he's needed. Things aren't going too well at the laboratory."

"In what way?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I shouldn't tell you. Still, I'd rather like your interpretation. Can I come down tomorrow and talk with you a bit?"

"Of course, surely. Come on home with me now and have some beer?"

She said that she had better not now because it was late and she needed all the sleep she could get at present. It was very decent of me to have brought her home like this.

I let her out on the sidewalk before the apartment house where she lives and she stood against the darkness, a figure with lovely lines and an effect of grace and strength.

She said, "I have come to the conclusion, Anne, that jealousy is the first-born brat of the devil."

"I'm not jealous," I said, throwing in the clutch.

"My dear, I wasn't referring to you," she explained quickly. "Jeffrey has the moral integrity of a New England church steeple."

"To err is human," I said. "Come to tea tomorrow," and I drove on off.

I would not think of Jeffrey careening all over the country with a dark-haired enchantress. I would not. . . . Jeffrey sitting opposite her in a dining bar. Jeffrey with her in some hotel bedroom. Jeffrey, contrite but under the spell of her influence, picking out that ring and the clips! Moreover he had put his pistol in his suitcase. Men don't carry pistols when going off with enchantresses. . . . Or do they? Perhaps men like Jeffrey do.

I had to swallow to keep back tears.

Helen Haleck had spoken from the top of her mind, blown the froth off. She had a quick, relentless frankness that accorded with her vitality. She was an interesting person of much accomplishment, attractive, wearing her expensive clothes well. As my grandmother used to say, she was "a person of means" but she worked hard at her scientific research and was regarded as having much promise. This was surprising, too, for she had lived a life of such diversion and gaiety and color before buckling down to postgraduate study. Her father, I believe, was "in rubber," and she had lived with him in the wilds of Burma and Brazil and I don't know where all. Wisps of stories about her drifted up sometimes from those past years. She had established a school for the children of her father's laborers in Brazil. She herself had taught sewing in it, and baseball. She had worked for a winter in Labrador and been lost in a blizzard and nearly frozen to death going from her car to somebody's front door. This was on some errand of spectacular mercy. She had, so somebody hinted, nearly or perhaps quite shot an overseer who was being brutal to a wretched Malayan. The impression of her personality emerged, from what one heard about her, as a young woman of force and generosity and beauty and also a dominating impulse to drag up the underdog to a status of comfort and fun.

And as for Jeffrey and the enchantress, I knew there was nothing in it: it was baseless, foundationless rumor, it was gossip, it was scandal. I would drive it out of the back door of my mind and slam and lock the door on it.

I drove on home to our new house on Stanley Street. Afterward I remembered noticing a car parked across the road.

I put mine in our garage, locked the doors, and walked toward the side door of our house. It was a new one, at least for us. We had moved in in May, our old one having been bombed in the winter in connection with the Giddings case. This one is larger than our former one, very modern, white with a moss-green roof. The back garden has three maple trees and also groups of shrubs here and there. It is a pleasant small space, charming with grass and sunlight and shadow during the day, and lovely at night with stars between the leaves of the trees.

There is a large lilac bush near the steps to the side terrace. And of course the first of July is past the lilac season. Not that I would ever have thought, though, that that scent coming from the bush was perpetrated by any misguided lilac. It was suggestive of cheap barbershops patronized by cheap, undesirable men. Why should the smell of hair tonic be wafting out from one of my lilac bushes at eleven o'clock at night? The presence of hair tonic presupposes a head to put it on.

This was disagreeable in the extreme.

As I stood staring at the bush I saw, or did I imagine I saw, behind it a darker shadow—two darker shadows, crouching?

I said, forcing my voice into steadiness, "Who is there, please?"

Two men rose and came around the bush toward me. One had no hat on. The other took his off. A foreign voice, astonishingly a cultivated voice, said, "This is Zunyer, Mrs. McNeill. Where can we talk together about our business?"

I replied, "Mr. Zunyer, I have no intention whatever of discussing any business with you. If you have anything to say to me you should have come to the front door properly and given your name to my maid. I will have no conversation with people who lurk behind bushes and waylay me." At that I started on toward the house.

I was not pleased to see that the other man was standing in my way with a revolver. He said, "No, you don't, lady. Chief, we can't let her go now." He had the sharp, nervous accents of a man who in his youth has knocked about the streets of lower New York or Brooklyn, a man who has learned to meet life with hostile suspicion and repay it with cruelty.

We were near the low wall of the stone side terrace. The bones having disappeared from my legs, I was glad to sit down on this wall. Of the two shadowy men before me the one who had said he was Zunyer was a stocky form, but not short. The other was smaller and slighter. He was the one who didn't have a hat.

Looking at the men and the revolver, I felt frightened and inadequate and wished, in wretchedness, for Jeffrey. If I shouted for help would this man shoot me? If I did cry out would anyone hear, and who was there about who could act quickly and adequately? The house next door, resting quietly in its garden, was dark and silent and in its rooms there slept three elderly, good sisters. Our other neighbors were away for the summer. Inside my house my small son, Michael, was asleep. In a room near by our cook Mary was also doubtless asleep, though with her ear cocked, listening to him as she always assured me. But what could she do if I cried out for help and this man shot me? And how frightened Michael would be if he woke to that horror. Never in all his life would he forget the sound of his mother screaming. And how deeply injuring an experience for him if I were to be found, dead, at the foot of our own terrace in a puddle of blood!

No, I should have to manage this situation with all the self-control and quickness of wit I could summon.

I said, "Mr. Zunyer, please ask your—your colleague to put the revolver back in his pocket. What is it you wish to say? Or is this a holdup?"

The man Zunyer answered, "You know this isn't a holdup, Mrs. McNeill. And you know I couldn't have come to your door and given my name."

"No person on any honest business is afraid to give his name."

"I give it to you, Mrs. McNeill, but beyond that, no."

"We're not taking no chances," the other man snapped.

"The hare leaps from the bush where we least expect her," Zunyer said. "And now, Mrs. McNeill, in the idiom of your country, it is time for you to 'come on over.' "

"To come over?" I said. "Over where?"

"To come across," the man with the revolver explained impatiently. "Tell her she's got to come across."

The heavier figure chuckled slightly. He said, "I have not yet so much facility in finding my way around the side roads of your language. Put up the gun, Pierre; for a good woman a small bridle is sufficient. Moreover we were warned, remember, there would be a show of reluctance 'to save face.' "

The second man made a disagreeable sound of scornfulness and put the revolver in his pocket. I noticed that he kept his hand in his pocket too.

"I am going into my house," I said, "and you are to leave at once."

"The distinguished Mrs. McNeill has always been thought of as a lady of honor," Zunyer said.

"I'm afraid I don't see how honor is involved," I replied. "I have no money with me, but if you want this ring . . ."

"By no means—the ring is yours, Mrs. McNeill."

I stood up and moved toward the house. The man Pierre whipped the revolver out of his pocket. "Stand still," he ordered. "We can't stand here palavering all night. . . . Chief, we're not getting nowhere like this."

The two spoke together, swiftly, in what I thought was Spanish.

Zunyer said softly, with great courtesy, "It will be more comfortable, Mrs. McNeill, if you will step into my car where we can discuss the matter in leisure."

"Not more comfortable for me. I shall certainly not go with you." I was ashamed to find myself shivering.

He said, "I do not understand your policy. There has been enough of this, surely. It is true, a fly does not enter a shut mouth, but by this means we are arriving nowhere."

"I have never heard a more true statement," I agreed "Good night."

He stepped over to me and his hand closed on my right arm above the elbow. He said to his companion, "Go out and see if it is the moment," and the other hurried out of our yard. "This is an agreeably situated house of yours," Zunyer said. "To face a park as this does creates an impression of urbanity and graciousness which one would expect but naturally in the house of Mrs. McNeill."

"Mr. Zunyer," I said, "you speak of not understanding my policy; yours, certainly, is inexplicable. You seem to be too intelligent a man not to know the consequences of behavior like this."

He answered, "Let us speak of consequences later. I am sure that shortly we will arrive at a better understanding. There is now just some small matter that has gone, as is your idiom, not quite according to Boyle."

"To Hoyle," I found myself correcting him.

"Thank you, to Hoyle."

Just the sort of whistle one associates with evil signals came now from the front of the house.

The hand tightened above my elbow and the man said in his pleasant modulations, "I am sure that Mrs. McNeill is too intelligent a lady not to appreciate the awkward consequences of a scream." He began to walk with me around the side of the house.

I said, "You are kidnaping me. Perhaps you have not heard that in this country the penalty for that is death."

"Let us not talk of death," he said, with unhappy sincerity. "I know that every pig has its St. Martin's day, but until then I avoid the thought. I admit that I have what amounts to an antipathy toward death. But I am not kidnaping you, Mrs. McNeill. I am only inviting you to take a small ride with me."

I wondered if he understood, if he intended, the terrifying implication of the phrase.

We came out of my driveway onto the sidewalk where the other man was lurking, keeping watch.

I said, "Look here, Mr. Zunyer. I think you have mixed me up with some other Mrs. McNeill."

He was amused at that and gave my arm a little squeeze as of affection. He answered, "It is well known that there is only one Mrs. McNeill. Watch your head, please, as you get into the car."

"Yes, and don't forget that I'm right in the back seat with the revolver," Pierre added.

What can one do under the circumstances? Break away and rush across the street, crying out, "Help, help, help—police!" until a bullet in your back stretches you on your face, dead, and the car goes tearing off into oblivion? What can you do?

I got into the front seat beside Zunyer as they indicated.

The two doors of the car slammed. Zunyer stepped on the starter and I looked back at my house and hoped that Jeffrey would find a kind stepmother for Michael. I thought, "I shall never see them again," and felt fear growing colder and colder in my stomach and throat as we drove with accelerating speed down the street.

The car smelled of that hair tonic, which came, I realized, from the man on the back seat. He seemed to be leaning forward toward me. I had the idea that his revolver was being held at the back of my neck, but I did not actually feel it, nor did I care to turn around and look. We were driving on the old Tavern Road toward the north, and if I could only keep track of where they were taking me, perhaps I stood some chance of eventual release or escape.

In the darkness I could see Zunyer's profile, like those shadow silhouettes that our ancestors were so fond of. He had large features, a prominent forehead, long upper lip, an underlip that protruded, and a chin that did not lack force but blurred away into the flesh of a stout neck.

"This New England countryside," he was saying, "has much charm for me; more than your West. The smaller hills, the more restricted horizons, have a friendliness. It is as if that one whom you call old Mother Nature—she is the same one, I think, Mrs. McNeill, don't you, as Demeter—invites you in and offers you tea with cream and sugar——"

I said, "Mr. Zunyer, I suppose you are trying to impress me as being different from the usual type of gangster—but I am not impressed."

"Gangster?" He laughed with unrestrained amusement. He half turned toward the back seat and I was afraid that we would run off the road and hit a pole, for he was driving at nearly sixty miles an hour now. He said, "You hear that, Pierre? Me, a gangster! Mrs. McNeill, it is said in my country that a melon and a woman are difficult to know, which is indeed true. And you play a very pretty game, but I cannot understand the rules of it and so I think that from now on, because it is something of a matter of time, you must play by my rules. Yes? So now let us really talk the turkeys. Shall we? Here is a quiet road where perhaps we will not be found."

He turned quickly off the main road, drove along a side one, up a rocky lane, passed a house that seemed an abandoned, dilapidated farm, passed a falling barn, and drew up in thick darkness under some trees.

I thought, "Now there will come the bullet with my name on it," and felt a little sick.

I said, "If it is a matter of money . . ."

"Oh, so that is it, is it?" Zunyer answered. "A golden key will open any door."

"What door? What key?" I asked. My voice sounded irritated. "I can't understand you at all, Mr. Zunyer."

"Nor I you, Mrs. McNeill, although previously to this night I have rather prided myself at my understanding of women."

"Listen, Chief," the man behind us said. His voice was harsher than ever with anxiety. "I told you it wouldn't work this way; it was taking too big a chance. It's going wrong, see. It's all going wrong."

Zunyer turned and laid his right arm along the back of the seat. I moved away from him, leaning against the door, and just as the thought came to me that I might try now, this instant, to get out and run off into the fields, the sharp voice behind me said, "You sit right where you are, Mrs. McNeill. I got my gun on you."

"I told you not to speak to this lady as if she were one of your low water-front women," Zunyer spoke angrily. "Mrs. McNeill—we are, it seems, working at cross intentions. That which I want now is for you to tell me what you know—and then I will take you home."

I said, "Mr. Zunyer—you want me to tell you what I *know?* This is a very extraordinary request."

"Not so extraordinary," he answered softly, with a meaning which, however, meant nothing whatever to me.

"I know a little about English literature and housekeeping and young children and crime detection. Which subject interests you?" I could hear myself speaking dryly, to keep my voice from shaking.

Mr. Zunyer answered, more angrily now, "Having advertised wine, Mrs. McNeill, you sell vinegar."

"I advertised no wine," I declared, equally angrily, "and I am sure that you have mistaken me for another Mrs. McNeill!"

He peered forward, looking at my face. Even in the dim light I could see concern in his eyes.

Behind me the other man was breathing too fast, as if under some strain. He said, "See, I told you—I told you. We got to do it the other way."

"That begins to make itself obvious," Zunyer answered. He said, "I regret this, Mrs. McNeill, but if you will not play by my rules, then we must go somewhere and do what is possible to straighten out this matter and to arrive, as I say, at the destination of an understanding. . . . Okay, Pierre."

Before I knew what was happening a scarf came down over my face and knots were tied with vindictive jerks behind, tied too tightly, hurting my nose, reminding me of years ago, of blind-man's buff, which had always frightened me, playing it on my grandmother's lawn, of stumblings and wild attempts with outstretched arms to find and catch Jeffrey, the older cousin, the wonderful one who could always make all things right.

I thought, "Oh, Jeffrey darling, you wouldn't like this to be happening to me. If you only knew, you could do something!" And I thought, unreasonably, that if he had left me his address I might send out an absolute volley of thoughts to him and surely, surely, he would wake, wherever he was—he couldn't be in a hotel room with an enchantress—wake and know that I was in danger and would come home, fly home and get to me in time.

II

I TRIED to keep my mind on the road as we drove on. But we were going so fast and had made so many turns that, blindfolded as I was, I lost all sense of direction. After a time we turned into what I thought must be a main cement highway, for I felt the recurrent, small bump, smooth-running, bump, smooth-running intervals that indicate the dividing lines between the sections of paving. And also I heard the rumble of trucks as we passed them and were passed in turn. Twice we stopped, presumably for traffic lights, and I think I would have tried to get out then, or at least might have cried out on the chance that someone might be passing and hear me, but the voice from the back seat reminded me that the gun was still there, ready, so I made no effort. The men did not talk, and I sat quietly and tried to count the cross lines in the road. I had no idea whether we were going east or west or north or south, nor could I even guess at the time. Finally we turned off onto a softer road surface. I heard a small sound indicating that one of the car windows was being rolled down. Up to now they had been closed. I smelled the cool freshness of night air over salt marshes and inlets, and realized that we must be somewhere near the Sound. In another five minutes or less the car stopped.

Zunyer said, "Very good now, Mrs. McNeill. This way, please." He held my arm above the elbow again and piloted me along a soft path, where I felt long, damp grasses finger across my instep and cling for a second to my stockings. Then wood was beneath my feet, and Zunyer was saying, "Now a step down, Mrs. McNeill. That is right. Now sit down here."

The floor below me moved and there was a sound of the lapping of water. I must have been on a boat. Zunyer was doing something near by and someone thudded down, making the boat rock. Zunyer spoke with annoyance in quick Spanish.

There was the smell of oil now, mingled with that of the night and salt and water. Zunyer, or the other, seemed to be trying to start an engine of some sort. There were the sounds made by irritated men working over a recalcitrant engine. Since they were both busy I put up my hands and tried to move the bandage away from my eyes. If I could do that I would jump overboard, at least make some attempt to escape, but the knots were too tight and as I fumbled at them something struck my left wrist brutally and Pierre's voice was swearing at me and warning me to keep my hands down or he'd break all the bones of them. Then Zunyer, who seemed, oddly, to be my champion, cursed Pierre, and my wrist ached intolerably, but I merely held it with the other hand and said nothing. Suddenly the engine came to life and I had the sensation of being hurled forward into spray and wind and darkness. It was a speedboat, its motor ripping the night.

I suppose it could not have been long before we slowed down, the noise of the engine subsided, we came into calm water, and there seemed to be the activity of coming into and tying up at a dock.

There followed the problem of getting me off the boat.

Now, apparently, it was well to be cautious, for the men's voices were lowered to whispers. I had to go up a ladder, with Zunyer giving me directions and pulling my shoulders from above.

I thought, "We are on an island in the Sound, an island with pine trees," for I smelled pine in the wind.

I was being taken, quickly now, along a sandy path, up a steep short hill, along a flat stretch, somewhere near bayberry or sweet fern, then across lawn, up more steps, across wood, through a doorway, and onto a rug.

The scarf was taken from my eyes and I was standing in a living room that had wicker and green-stained furniture, rag rugs, and kerosene lamps. There were flowers on the tables—bowls of wild roses, which were very charming. It was a pleasant room, undistinguished, entirely usual, not at all one's conception of the haunt of a gangster.

Nor was the man who had brought me here the typical gangster. He was stocky and heavy-set and he moved heavily. The profile that I had seen in the car was now part of a large face belonging on his large body. He had grayish, scanty hair receding from the forehead. He was one of those people who seem constructed with too many creases, creases in his clothes and in his cheeks and fingers. There were soft, dark pouches beneath his eyes. But he did not lack distinction. Perhaps it was that his eyes were so very intelligent and his mouth, although sensual, was not cruel. Moreover he had an air of apology, of friendliness.

But the other man, Pierre, was very different. He was small and nervous. He wore a brown suit and a yellow sport shirt and tan tie. His black hair was slicked down like a cap over his head, and his mouth was too small, his teeth bad, and his hands dirty.

"It is a matter which I regret exceedingly, Mrs. McNeill," Zunyer said, "that this has happened. But I am sure that now all will be well and we can work together. . . . This is a chair which you will, I think, find comfortable."

He put one beside a table and got cigarettes and matches, playing the part of the courteous host.

Pierre sat gloomily on a straight chair and stared at me.

Someone was coming down the stairs. I could see out of the wide door into the hall and a long flowered skirt was swishing down, against banisters. A woman in a gay blue housecoat stood in the doorway. She had a Nordic, Brünnehilde type of beauty, and was the sort of woman you might see anywhere in any beach community, buying bread and lettuce and tomatoes beside you at a supermarket. She said, "Oh, Juan, I thought I heard the boat's engine. . . . Konrad is upset again."

Zunyer said, "That is too bad." He sounded worried. "Mrs. McNeill, this is my wife."

I said, "How do you do?" with as much politeness as I could at the moment muster. I did not say that it was pleasant to meet her.

She smiled at me, dimly, but it was easily seen that her mind was not in the room here. She said, "Konrad hasn't been able to get to sleep for even ten minutes. He dropped off once and then he had his dreams again. We should have left him with Hilda."

The man sighed and said that perhaps they should. "Tell him to get something to eat and leave his light on and read awhile. Tell him that shortly I will come upstairs and see him. . . . Is one of the guest rooms ready where Mrs. McNeill can spend the night? It was necessary that she come with us to discuss some business matter."

"The pink room is ready," Mrs. Zunyer answered, and as she was leaving the room, "Would you like coffee, Juan?"

He said we should be very much pleased to have some coffee, if it would not be putting her to too much inconvenience.

She disappeared down the hall and Zunyer let himself into a creaking chair some five feet away from mine.

"Now, Mrs. McNeill," he said, leaning forward with his hands on his knees. "Now let us have no more of the vinegar, but the good red wine as advertised."

I answered quietly, "Please believe me, Mr. Zunyer, when I say that I know of no vinegar—that I have never advertised any wine."

He said, "That is a figure of speech. We do that in my country, employ such means of conveying our ideas. To me it is less blunt, less crude a manner of expression than that employed, for instance, by your 'gangsters.' " He smiled quite agreeably.

"I recognize it as a figure of speech," I said.

"And you have nothing to offer?"

"No."

"Still nothing?"

"Still."

"But, Mrs. McNeill, I must know what you know. You must tell me."

I said, "I have offered you your choice of subjects."

"But that is foolishness."

"I am sorry."

"If it is the golden key that opens all doors, I suppose then that we can meet your price."

"I have nothing for sale, Mr. Zunyer. Nothing whatever, nor do I know at all what you want to buy."

Across the room Pierre said, "It's worth trying."

Mr. Zunyer sighed again, moved himself so that he could the more easily reach a pocket, and from it brought out a roll of bills. Looking at me, he said, "Five hundred more? A thousand?"

"More?" I said. "Five hundred dollars *more?*"

"Yes, more," he repeated. "And I am glad that you like the ring."

It was a shock. It was as if a flash had come, for a moment blinding one, and then leaving a sense of even greater darkness.

I said, "Did you send the ring, Mr. Zunyer? Thank you. I thought my husband had sent it to me."

I took it off and put it on top of a magazine on a table. It was partly in the shadow of the lamp, partly in the light.

"Your husband?" Zunyer said. I did not like his tone now. He said, "It is well known, Mrs. McNeill, that you and your husband are no longer in sympathy and that you—well——"

"Why not cut the palavering?" Pierre's voice shot out. "Why not get to the point now? We haven't got a lot of time to lose. We've got to get going on this thing. Mrs. McNeill, we know that you're willing to sell out your husband for a price, and we got the price. Mr. Zunyer here's already paid you plenty, as you know, and you needn't pretend all white innocence and lilies that you don't know it. Come on now." He came toward me and stood looking down with one of the ugliest expressions I have ever seen on a human face. "Come on now. Come across."

I looked at the other man and asked, "Mr. Zunyer, just exactly what is it that you want?"

He dropped his voice. "Mrs. McNeill, if I have to put it into words, which are always unwise in this sort of business, I want to know what you know, but if it's been too hard or complicated for you to understand or to memorize, which after all I can't blame you for, I must have the missing pages."

I looked at him and made no comment. But those words of his had given me, as it were, a second momentary flash of light.

We sat looking into each other's eyes and I saw doubt and then something like fright come into Zunyer's. He looked up at Pierre.

"Pierre," he said, "it may be that I am trying to pick pears off an elm."

"No," Pierre said. "Try again. She knows. She's just playing a game."

"Perhaps it is that you don't trust me?" Zunyer asked.

And I answered, "Perhaps."

"I shall go one step further," he said. "I shall say that which should never be mentioned."

I wondered, "Is the man mad? Are they all mad? What name is never to be mentioned?" And I thought of the theory held by certain old religions that it is destruction of the universe to utter the ineffable name of God.

Zunyer leaned further forward on his chair and it was as if the whole room were silent and frightened, waiting.

He whispered, "U-235."

The universe was not shattered. There was no world-splitting crash, no fire from on high. What his password meant I had no idea whatever. I sat and shook my head.

There was a pause while Zunyer looked at me, and gradually consternation deepened in his eyes.

The other man said hoarsely, "Now you have done it. Now she's gotta talk!"

"But what about? What about?" I said.

Zunyer twisted his hands together. He said to Pierre, "I think it is that I am looking for five feet on a cat."

"No, the lady's holding out on yer. Ye got to be firm. Ye got to let her know that we mean business. There's no other way. I told yer."

"But she won't talk!"

"There's ways to make them!"

The voices of the two were hardly above a whisper, tense, excited.

"But not that way. I, Zunyer, will not permit it."

"Okay then, are you letting her go home and tell McNeill what's happened and what you just said? Dream up what that'll mean. Face up to it."

Zunyer actually groaned. He said, "It may be that we can trust her not to talk."

Pierre made a derisive sound.

I said, "You are discussing me as if I were a piece of furniture."

"No, an objet d'art, Mrs. McNeill! . . . Oh, my dear lady, can't you understand how serious this situation is becoming? If you will not work with us, you are our enemy, and we cannot afford to have enemies. It is impossible that we permit enemies to exist."

I asked, "Did you send me the diamond clips and put that deposit of two thousand dollars in the bank?"

"Who else? But naturally."

"Why? Who led you to believe that I had anything to sell you—anything of such great importance?"

"Importance—oh, my God!" Pierre said.

The woman's steps were heard in the hall again. I saw her carrying a tray, and I needed the coffee. But Zunyer called out, "Not now, my dear. Later perhaps. We are busy, in conference. . . . Mrs. McNeill, now be reasonable. It is this way——"

"Don't spill any more beans!" Pierre warned sharply. "Don't say nothing at *all!*"

"Who is behind this?" I demanded. To know that was to find the explanation of this terrifying coil. That, I thought, would straighten us out, if possible; if anything could make this right.

Zunyer's face was gray, and although a cool wind was coming in through the screened windows, perspiration ran down his forehead and he took a large clean handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face.

He said, "Mrs. McNeill, you are a lady of intelligence and much charm and beauty. It might be that if you would, upon your honor, promise that you would not tell your husband or any other person of this night or of what has been said here, that I might let you go away—go home to your little boy——"

"You're crazy—you're crazy!" The other man's voice almost rose to a scream, but he dropped it immediately and protested with vehemence. "Trust her? How can yer trust her? Let her out of here, and what'll it mean?"

I said, "I couldn't give you my word of honor not to tell my husband."

"But do you see then what it will be necessary to *do?*" Zunyer spoke with desperation. "And to me it is a thought intolerable. I am not that sort of a man, I assure you. It is not in my habit of life. Particularly with a woman of your—your distinction. Mrs. McNeill, I beg of you to spare me this so distasteful, so repellent a necessity. Do you realize what it may be necessary for me to do?"

"I understand your implications."

"By all the saints, Mrs. McNeill, you are as brave as the sword of the Cid."

He wiped his forehead again and blew his nose. I thought there were tears in his eyes.

Pierre said eagerly, as if with hunger, "Don't feel too bad. I'll take it over. That's the advantage of having the water so handy."

"But they're always found afterward. They float!"

"Not if they are weighted."

I felt that perhaps I had almost reached the point where I could no longer sit still, pretending that this was just the sort of casual conversation one indulges in at tea. It was not easy to keep my voice cool and detached, my hands from trembling. And I kept thinking of Jeffrey, wishing so agonizingly that he were here. I saw no possible way out of this situation. I thought that this time I really had come to the end.

"Shall I do it now?" Pierre asked.

"No, no. It is still only half past twelve—and the boy is still awake and reading. We will wait. Perhaps she will come to her senses."

"That's right. I still think she's holding out on yer."

"Mrs. McNeill, I will give you another opportunity. I will take you up to the pink room for a time so that you can sit there and think of these matters. Then when I come up you will be ready, I am sure, and we will come to an understanding?" He said this pleadingly, with emotion. "Please, be a nice lady!"

I got up from my chair and said, "I think it will be a good idea to leave me for a little while."

So they went upstairs with me, one before and one behind. At the top the woman in the flowered housecoat came out of one room and a boy came out of another. He was a child about twelve years old, thin and rather appealing. He wore a striped flannel wrapper and held Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* in his hand. If he had been my child I should have been worried about his pallor, his deep-set eyes and look of nervous fragility.

He said, "Hi, Daddy. I thought you were coming up to see me."

Mr. Zunyer said, "Mrs. McNeill and I have had business to discuss. . . . This is Mrs. McNeill, Konrad. Say how do you do to her."

The boy made a quick motion with his heels as if to click them and then checked himself. He nodded his head and said, "How do you do, Mrs. McNeill."

I said, "How do you do, Konrad. I see you have a book I am very fond of."

"I like it a lot," he answered. He too had a little foreign accent and attractive modulations of the voice. "I like the stories about England and the great wall," he said.

I said, "I once met Mr. Kipling, when I was a child," and I was about to tell him of that great experience when Mr. Zunyer said, "We must not keep Mrs. McNeill standing here when she is so tired. Kon, my boy, get into bed and I will come up to you shortly, and you, Gerta, will you go down and get the coffee now? Mrs. McNeill, shall Pierre bring some up to you?"

I thanked him and said I thought not, it might prevent my sleeping. It had occurred to me that they might poison it.

The boy went back to his room and Zunyer closed his door. The woman went downstairs and the two men showed me into a room down the hall. We stood in the dark for a few moments while Zunyer fumbled for matches and the lamp.

I thought, "It isn't possible, in a normal sort of house like this with a woman and a child in it. They were trying to frighten me."

But Pierre spoke in the darkness, saying, "Listen, lady, don't make the mistake of thinking you can get away with anything, because I have my gun still and unless you hand out what we need there's only one way out for you."

There was the scratch of a match and in a moment a lamp had brought the room into reality about us.

"And for me—I beg of you, do not make it necessity for me to throw my soul over my shoulders," Zunyer pleaded.

"No, that would be a pity, wouldn't it?" I said.

Pierre said, "We'd better take the sheets and blankets, Chief. They might come in too handy for her."

"Oh, I doubt it—well, it might be." The two stripped the bed even of the pillowcases. Pierre looked out into the hall and whispered, "Okay, Chief."

"We will be back shortly," Mr. Zunyer said.

The men went out, laden down with bedding, and I heard, very quietly, the key turn in the lock.

I stood in the middle of the room waiting until their footsteps disappeared. Then I took the lamp to look about and see if any escape were possible. Shading it, I looked out of the windows, hoping that there might be a piazza roof below them, but there was not. There was a straight drop down from both the front and the side windows. Below the front ones there were black forms that were ornamental evergreens about six feet high. Through the darkness I saw, off at the left, an indistinct bit of woodland, trees, and, I thought, rocks. Beyond and below this in the distance I saw dimly the water of the Sound. The windows were too high for me to drop from unless I were willing to risk a broken leg.

I took the lamp and explored the resources of the room. There were pink walls and flowered curtains and white-painted furniture. There was a closet, empty except for a quantity of wire coat hangers. There was on a bookcase a Victorian clock in the form of a Greek temple, with a brass clock key beside it. In the adjoining bathroom there was nothing except the usual fixtures, three guest towels, and a cake of pink soap.

I came back into the bedroom and thought, "I shall have to wait and keep as calm as possible and hope to manage the situation adequately when they come back.

I must not let myself go to pieces. I'm tired, and if I rest I shall be keener when I need my wits."

I lay down on the bare mattress with my hands under my head and tried to relax. Perhaps, if I could think quietly, think back over everything that had happened during the last few weeks, I might come to some explanation of the circumstances of this evening. Perhaps, even, I might come to an understanding of Zunyer and so be able to extricate myself from a situation which, at the moment, seemed the worst, the most perilous, the most incomprehensible in which I had ever been placed.

But Zunyer's mention of missing pages did have some meaning to me. And the tragedy of the missing pages had occurred two weeks before.

III

I SHALL ALWAYS REMEMBER that particular day because of three circumstances. One was a black, swift, and violent thunderstorm in the morning. Another was Walter Dejon's birthday supper, and the third was—a tragedy.

Now at Walter's party his colleagues, the members of Dr. Julian's group, or unit as it was called, were to be the other guests. They were Dr. Julian's people, his brilliant chemists whom he had gathered together for some particular problem in research. Besides Julian himself there were eight other scientists with the devotion to the truth, the intellectual integrity, intelligence, and generosity that characterize the best of that class. These were perhaps unusually individualistic; that made them interesting. And since they were all warmly friendly to me· I naturally liked them very much.

There were the trio of young Ph.D.s who had been Dr. Julian's own graduate students: Ames Auger, the one of most promise; Sam Talbert, who reminded me of an antisocial but in spite of that an appealing airedale; and Tom Morse, a lank boy, black-haired, with something of the sweetness of a very small child about him, and yet with strength in his face and fanaticism in his eyes. This fanaticism was inherited from a long line of Methodist preacher ancestors.

It was that strain which made trouble for the group.

There was Pauline Dunbar, Dr. Julian's secretary. She had silvery gold hair that fell to her shoulders and she looked well in dirndls, very well in fact. She had true beauty, a sort of goosegirl, barefoot-in-the-fields-at-dawn kind of beauty, but there was a single, short, vertical line in the middle of her forehead, and when you see a woman with that, my grandmother used to say, you will know that there is temper, uncontrolled.

These four were the younger members of the unit. There were five others, if you include Dr. Julian. But perhaps it is better to have them develop as one goes along.

Jeffrey and I had stopped first at the Julians', whose place abutted the Dejons' at the back. Dr. Julian had had some urgent matter to discuss with Jeffrey, so I had sat for a few minutes waiting for them and for Mrs. Julian to come out. After the morning's storm the afternoon had turned sunny and warm and the evening was lovely with a smell of lawns and roses.

I was pleased with my new evening dress, which was a cotton Liberty print in shades of lavender and cream.

The Julians' swimming pool was a long blue rectangle with a surface shimmer of gold in the early evening sunlight. Elm shadows lay softly across the lawn. The Julian grandchildren must have been having fun in the pool this afternoon. Their toys were still scattered around, a great ball in melon-slice stripes of different colors, a battle fleet of miniature boats bobbing about in the water. There was a bicycle pump near a deck chair and a partly inflated large rubber horse that must have had leopard blood, for it was yellow with black spots. It had a surgeon's plaster patch under its left eye.

It was late, past the time when we should have arrived at the party. Other guests had come. I could see them between the bushes and on the side terrace of the Dejons' small red brick house. Laughter came from there, and the sound of Helen Haleck's voice with its pleasant vitality, its individual accent derived from easy familiarity with other languages and years of living in other lands. Gay, broken phrases drifted over: "Hi, Pauline. . . . Hi, Sam Talbert. . . . Where's Ames? Hasn't he come yet? . . . Walter—Walter, you're neglecting your duties! Where's the birthday boy?" and then singing: "Happy birthday to you—happy birthday, dear *Wal*ter, happy birthday to you!"

Dr. Julian and Jeffrey came out of the house behind me and crossed the grass.

Dr. Julian was a tall, stout man, bald, with rather protuberant eyes, a smallish nose, and a kind mouth. He was a physician and a very eminent chemist. If his mental equipment could have been seen through a plate glass in his head, interpreted in terms of scientific apparatus, it would have been beautifully designed, gleaming, and smoothly and swiftly functioning. This evening he wore a dinner jacket. He and his wife belonged to that generation who regard form as one of the firmest foundations of life.

Jeffrey had not worn a dinner jacket. Most of the men of our university "dress" only on rare and great occasions. But Jeffrey's dark blue suit became him admirably and I was proud of him. He is tall and dark and thin. His air of authority and, perhaps also, less fortunately that of impatience and slight intolerance are increasing as he grows older.

He looked at me, smiled, and raised one eyebrow in a small gesture that indicated approval of my appearance. This was gratifying.

Dr. Julian greeted me courteously, apparently under the impression that I, like his wife, was deaf. He addressed me in a loud voice as Joan and was corrected by Mrs. Julian, who joined us with two small nubbly birthday gifts.

We crossed the lawn together, Mrs. Julian and Jeffrey leading and Dr. Julian and I following them. He stopped me a moment to pick a yellow rose from one of the beds beyond the pool. He took a small gold knife from his pocket, carefully cut off the thorns, and gave the rose to me. As we walked on he said:

"I am very thankful that it is not my wife and I who have been laboring to prepare this party alone, without help, in that tiny house there. I suppose I am a wicked old man, but I must admit that I have come to the time of life when space and material comforts mean a great deal to me. Frankly I don't know how I could do without them, how I could possibly adjust myself to curtailment."

"Why should you have to?" I asked.

He said sadly, "One never has saved when one should—has one?"

I answered that this one at least had never seemed to manage it.

And he smiled and said he was afraid we were a pair of sadly improvident grasshoppers and, amused at this not very apt figure of speech, we went through bushes denoting the line, invisible like the equator, between the Dejons' and Julians'.

Here Walter Dejon, with five neckties about his neck and new handkerchiefs protruding from every pocket, put down his tray of cocktails and leapt from the terrace.

He said, "Hi, Doctor!" to Dr. Julian, kissed Mrs. Julian's hand to her astonishment, grinned at Jeffrey, said, "This is my day, you know. I can do exactly everything that *I* want. It was always a rule in our family." Whereupon he took me in his arms and kissed me, counting, "One, two, three, four," between the kisses.

There were cheers and applause from the terrace.

He got no further than four. Jeffrey with determination and ease had taken both his wrists and broken his grip on me. I stepped away and said, "It's not a particularly good rule, Walter," trying not to sound breathless.

His wife, Cynthia, had come down to us. She was holding the tray of old-fashioneds, laughing.

Walter said, "No fair, McNeill. No fair at all. There were twenty-five more due me."

Jeffrey said, "The rule in my family was a good stout cuff for each year, Dejon. How about it?" But he spoke lightly, without too much annoyance, took one of the cocktails, and gave it to Mrs. Julian, who was obviously not pleased with her host's behavior.

The episode would have slid off without undue emphasis if Cynthia had not said, "Hi, Anne, nice to see you," and then in general airy explanation, "Anne is always so sweet with Walter. He's just mad about her, aren't you, darling?"

"Quite, quite mad," Walter agreed blithely.

"Have an old-fashioned, Anne?" Cynthia handed me a glass.

Helen Haleck, sitting on the steps of the terrace, said lazily, "She made that one specially for you, Anne. The best prussic acid instead of rye."

This evoked slightly uncomfortable laughter from the group.

Cynthia said, "That's right, the best prussic acid I could buy. Want it, Anne?"

I said, "How nice. I prefer prussic acid to cyanide, really," sipped some, and said, "You certainly mix them well, Cynthia. You know just how, don't you?"

Then we went to the terrace, borne up the steps on a surf of greetings and laughter; and Helen Haleck, still sitting on the steps, looked at me, amused, and said, "Are you ever caught off base?"

"I try to watch the ball," I said, and people closed in around us and we were inundated with offers of hors d'oeuvres.

Sometimes, you know, when you drop in upon friends unexpectedly, you realize that you have come at just the wrong moment, that you have interrupted a crisis. There is an indefinable sense that something has been burning, although there is no smell of smoke or fire, nothing out of the ordinary to be seen, and you know that a conflagration of the emotions has been extinguished as you stepped in the door.

So at the Dejons' party I realized almost immediately that something was odd about it. The gaiety was not simply alcoholic. One has seen that too often to mistake its manifestations. There was no relaxation in this collective mood. There seemed to be a feeling of abnormal elation, nervous and overdone. It was something I had noticed before when several of Dr. Julian's unit were together and I had wondered at it, for it was as if they shared an unusual, frightening relationship; inexplicable. I thought, "These people act as if they were all tremendously overstimulated and as if at the same time they were under some great anxiety." Yet on the surface none of them was deviating from the conventional.

Where was Ames Auger? Cynthia was asking everyone. Where in the world could he be? They had been holding supper for him for ages. Why didn't he show up? But these were not much more than rhetorical questions because she didn't really care where he was; nobody else seemed to know and no one was ready yet to go in and eat.

We were all watching Walter, who was going about with a basket, crying as a vender, "Presents, presents—the pleased recipient is ready to receive his presents." Having gathered a collection of small packages of divers colors, he sat down on the terrace wall and untied paper ribbons with appropriate and extravagant remarks. There were socks and cigarettes and more neckties, all of which he received with engaging pleasure.

Those were two of Walter's most agreeable characteristics: his amusing immaturity and his ingenuous capacity for enjoyment. In appearance he was slight and willowy, not quite six feet tall. He had a long face, tan hair, and thick-rimmed glasses. I liked him and was sorry for him because I thought Cynthia goaded him continually to get more and more money and a better position in the university. She was one of those ambitious, avaricious wives, never satisfied, like the fisherman's wife in the fairy tale. I don't mean the one with the pudding on the nose, but the "Flounder, Flounder in the sea" one who finally wanted to be Pope and so destroyed everything she and her husband had gained and went back to living in a hovel. I doubt if Cynthia's desires were directed toward the Vatican, but probably they stopped very little short.

She was standing now with an old-fashioned in each hand, talking to Jeffrey. Looking up at him, she created an effect which must have been, to her, thoroughly satisfactory. It was that of a small, quite perfectly designed bronze figure. She was heavily sunburned and her dress was of rayon satin, the same color as her skin. It had sort of a halter top and sarong skirt and left the stomach uncovered to the view of all. I have never seen such a sunburned stomach in my life! Undoubtedly everyone there, except Mrs. Julian, wondered if that were a sample of the whole. Her hair was long and dark, parted, drawn back as plainly as if she had been somebody's great-grandmother in the 1860s. The resemblance, however, stopped there. Hooped gold earrings set off a face that made one think she might have had Balinese ancestors, but I believe her maiden name had been Baker and she had lived at Forest Hills. I don't know what her dancing career had been—she had appeared in a play or two and I believe several night clubs before Walter married her. I can imagine she must have been successful. I have seen her dance occasionally at formal affairs and have remembered those restricted performances. Beyond this, in regard to her activities, everyone admired her for her devotion to the good cause of the war. She made a point of sewing for some different relief organization every single day of the week.

Tom Morse, the Southern boy of evangelical descent, was standing talking to Pauline Dunbar, and suddenly the stress of his sincerity carried across to the rest of us, making our own chatter seem trivial and not worth continuing.

A silence framed what he was saying, brought it forward with startling emphasis.

"Miss Dunbar, you've got to admit that we are not laborin' in the vineyard of the Lord but in the vineyard of the Evil One. I tell you that sometimes when I'm walkin' along the street an' I think about it, 'so intense is the anguish of my spirit that the very pavements I step on seem to bend beneath my feet and I'm afraid that the earth will open and swallow me up to my everlasting punishment.' "

She laughed. I suppose any one of his contemporaries might have but that was not the comment he should have had.

I noticed that Helen Haleck and Torgerson glanced at each other with some shared and anxious reaction, and Dr. Julian looked quickly at Jeffrey and then at Morse as if in terror of what would be said next in that Southern drawl.

Helen, who had been talking kindly with Mrs. Julian about the older woman's allergies, drifted over to Pauline's side.

Morse was saying, "It's not funny, Miss Dunbar. I tell you I turned from my daddy's teachings when I went to college, but now I sure am trembling under the fearful apprehension of the wrath of God and our high responsibility to Him."

Sam Talbert called out, "What you need is a drink, Tom, old boy. Take a good stiff drink and you'll feel better."

Morse said with dignity, "I sure would appreciate a glass of water." He smiled over at Cynthia and said, "These little fishes on crackers are mighty good, ma'am, but they make you thirsty as a soul lost in hell."

Cynthia laughed. She said, "That's the intention. Dr. Julian, is his regular verbal line always so flavored with brimstone?"

The boy blushed and had, I knew, the impulse he had had often when he was a little boy barefoot on a sandy road. If he had not been on a paved terrace I am sure he would have tried to twist his toe into the earth. He looked down at his foot wretchedly.

Helen put her hand on his arm and said, "Come on in and get a glass of water."

He looked at her with such an expression of grateful adoration that I thought, "The poor lad is as deeply in love with her as Hans Torgerson is." And he followed her into the house.

Sam Talbert came over to me and said, "Morse has a bad case of the old-time religion, Mrs. McNeill. It's just developed in him lately. You ought to hear him and Ames Auger hurl around the insults when they get going. Me, I stand outside the ring and laugh at them both."

I said, "You don't join in the battle?" but I was not paying much attention to young Talbert because I had overheard a curious remark Dr. Julian made to Jeffrey.

They were standing near me and I heard Dr. Julian say under his breath, "You see, McNeill, I'm afraid it'll be a case for the F.B.I."

Why in the world the F.B.I.? I wondered. A case for a psychiatrist, perhaps, or a mental home, but to think of calling in the Federal Bureau of Investigation to handle religious hysteria was absurd.

I realized that Sam Talbert was saying to me, "No, I never join in the battles between Auger and Morse. I'm indifferent to anything of that sort. I only get excited when people begin to talk patriotism. That gets my goat. Maybe you think I've succumbed to a Stalinist plot and I'm trying to upset the American way of life and all that, but I think patriotism is the rotten false foundation upon which all modern civilization is built." He tipped up his cocktail glass against the bridge of his nose and tried to extract the cherry from among the ice.

When he had accomplished this I asked, "What would you substitute for patriotism?"

"A love for science; pure science. And internationalism, of course. That's what I am, an internationalist. But I suppose the F.B.I. would give me the bum's rush if they heard me talking like this."

I was wondering why the F.B.I. seemed to be figuring so prominently in people's minds this afternoon when Walter emitted a whoop, put down his tray of cocktails, and said, "There's another present in the basket! How did I come to miss it! How did I ever!"

He picked a very small package from the bottom of the basket. Opening this, he held in his hand a lead soldier. It was in a brown uniform, its right arm raised in the Nazi salute, and it had a tiny swastika band on the arm. The effect of this object upon Walter was astonishing. He looked at it as if he had unwrapped a scorpion. Then he dropped it to the floor and kicked it, furiously. It sailed off into bushes across the yard.

"Damn, damn, damn!" he said. "That's the last time he'll do a thing like that to me."

"Walter's showing off," Cynthia said. "He doesn't like to be teased about his juvenile tendencies. That's why he's in such a passion at being given a toy. . . . Walter, cease firing and go in and telephone Ames Auger and see why he isn't here. See if he's forgotten the day or the time or something."

To our embarrassment Walter said grumpily, "No, Cynthia, I don't want to do it. Flatly. I don't." He took up a cocktail from the tray and gulped it down as one does beer.

Hans Torgerson got up from the steps where he had been sitting. He moved as if he were tired, and his face, I thought, seemed more than usually lined. He looked at Walter and said kindly, rather as one speaks to a child who has been "making an exhibition of himself," "That is all right, Walter. Do not disturb yourself. I will telephone."

Helen happened to be standing by the door as he came to it. She wore a dress of some thick oriental silk, cream-colored with Persian embroidery. For a moment she and Torgerson stood together and I thought how fine-looking they were, how well suited to each other and how hopeless poor Tom Morse's infatuation for her was. She and Torgerson were both tall and long-boned, interesting, intelligent. Their hair was thick and of much the same texture, with a slight wave, but his was gray and hers a warm sandy brown. If you say, "She had a square face," you immediately think of someone with a box for a head or else a woman who looks like a lion, neither of which descriptions would in the least apply to Helen Haleck. But the modeling of her face was toward strength, toward a strong and definite beauty. You felt that both she and Torgerson were people whose lives had been of such varied experience that their values were not those of any local group, were not derived from influences of the New England Puritan, that, therefore, their reactions might be unpredictable and sometimes not conforming to one's own standards. But they were vivid, arresting personalities with generosity and warmth.

Torgerson looked at her and it seemed to me that an unspoken question and answer passed between them, expressed in an almost imperceptible lift of Torgerson's eyebrows and an equally slight nod of Helen's head. Then he went into the house and young Tom Morse came over and sat on the terrace edge beside me and told me about his daddy's little house in the mountains of West Virginia, about the poverty-stricken mining families he preached to, and about feuds and superstition and rattlesnakes and sometimes miracles.

IV

"COME ON, people." Cynthia had gone into the house and come out again, and sunlight gleamed on her dress until you felt that if someone hit it with a spoon it would give forth a clang. "The cafeteria is open. Line up, everybody. . . . Walter, perhaps even if it is your birthday you won't object to passing out the trays."

Crowding politely into the sun porch and the very small dining room, we were presented with assorted trays and told to help ourselves to anything we wanted, so we milled about among salads and cold cuts, sweet pickles and rolls.

Torgerson came back and said that a very disagreeable woman had answered the telephone. She said that Mr. Auger wasn't in his room and his door was locked and he must have taken the key when he went out.

"He's probably on his way here," Dr. Lajoie said sensibly.

"Or else he's forgotten," Walter said. "It'd be just like him."

"I'm sure he hasn't forgotten." Pauline came to his defense with indignation. "He never forgets anything. Do you suppose he is all right, Dr. Julian? He left the laboratory at about two, you know, with such a headache."

"Of course he's all right," Cynthia answered. "Hold everything, everybody, until I get the iced coffee. Jeffrey, my angel, would you come out with me and help me get the ice?"

He looked at me for a fleeting instant and it was pleasant to have that swift, shared amusement before he followed her.

Lajoie brought his tray over to me and suggested that we go into the living room and eat. So we sat there in comfort on a sofa whose chintz flowers, although gay, were too abundant for the size of the room, and Dr. Lajoie talked to me about his recent reading, the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, the *Medea* and *The Trojan Women*, and this and that, and I found him, as I had always thought him, an interesting, stimulating man. He was a person of middle age and medium height and arresting appearance, dark with steel-colored hair and an ascetic, extremely intelligent face. From Greek plays we found ourselves discussing patriotism and the obligation of the individual to his country. He had high and serious convictions about such responsibilities. From this subject we bridged over to ancestors. He told me that he was descended from a French-Canadian family, very old and, I gathered, of proud aristocracy. I knew he must have a considerable income aside from the salary he received from the university because he had a charming house on one of the best streets in town. He was not married and was served by an old but efficient Negro houseman.

We drifted away from genealogy which requires a certain amount of concentration. The rest of the guests were coming into the living room with their trays and food. Cynthia told them not to go back into the garden but to stay around nearer so they could all get refills.

Jeffrey brought me my iced coffee and said he would be glad to go home at any time if my headache were worse. This was invention on his part, for I almost never have headaches. He wanted to get off peacefully with me as soon as we could.

But Cynthia claimed him again and he went with her into the dining room.

Walter, after looking at Lajoie and me with an expression of indignant jealousy, went over and sat on the floor with Pauline Dunbar and Morse and Talbert. Poor Morse got up to fetch rolls and stepped into Talbert's salad plate, to his wretched contrition. I have never seen a boy more miserable and red.

"They're pathetic, aren't they?" Lajoie said to me. He was amused, but there was sympathy in his voice. He said, "I work with them at the laboratory and am astonished at the difference fifteen years makes between us. They can be intolerably irritating, but they are brilliant and well trained and are accomplishing amazing results—or almost. Not quite yet. Not yet."

It was at this point, I think, that the telephone rang and Walter got up from the floor and went into the other room to answer.

We were all silent, listening. It was as if we were waiting with apprehension, as if some foreknowledge had communicated itself through the insistent ringing of the bell.

We heard Walter saying, "Oh, my God, I don't believe it! He's just in a heavy sleep or a temporary fit or something. Why, he was all right, absolutely all right at lunch in the laboratory. Very well, very well—hold everything. Keep calm, I tell you. Don't do anything. Some of us will be right down."

It would have been better if he had not come into the room, blurting out to us that Auger's landlady said that he was dead.

Certain events, the appearance and reaction of certain personalities, stand out sharply in one's memory against the background blackness of such moments.

I saw the color slipping out of Pauline's face. She leaned over as she sat, putting her head to her knees as if to keep from fainting, and her pale gold hair fell about her face, veiling it in its moment of too open revelation. I saw Talbert watch her with an expression almost of satisfaction. I saw Torgerson's eyes meet Helen's and then seem to look further away, more stolidly, with more sadness into the past; and Lajoie's expression was that of a man who is looking upon someone lying in shocking death.

Dr. Julian was getting up with the difficulty of an old man from his deep chair. With his habit of loud speech for his wife's sake, he now called out, "McNeill, McNeill—do you hear that? Do you hear what's happened to Ames Auger?" He made his way hurriedly toward the dining room and Jeffrey appeared.

He said, "What is it, Dr. Julian?"

"Auger's dead, they say. I don't know anything more than that. Do you, Walter?"

Walter Dejon looked frightened. He shook his head and said he didn't know any of the details. The woman who called up had been weeping and about in hysterics. She said she had found another key to Ames's room and been able to open the door and had discovered him dead.

Dr. Julian said, "It can't be possible. I don't believe it.

. . . We can't give him up now, McNeill!" The man looked as if he were suffering from physical shock.

The feeling of panic, born of sudden and close death, broke out in ejaculations, in questioning, and in statements that it couldn't be—he had worked all morning in the laboratory—why, they had all had lunch together there in the common room as usual. He had had a good appetite—or had he? Perhaps, now that they thought of it, he hadn't. And he had gone home shortly afterward with that headache.

"Cerebral hemorrhage?" Lajoie suggested.

Pauline looked at him as if he had spoken disgusting slander about poor Ames. She said indignantly, "I don't believe for a minute it was cerebral hemorrhage. At his age, and his strength! I don't believe it. He can't be dead. It isn't possible!" She caught her breath and got up from the floor. She stood there in her flowered dirndl with her hair disheveled and her face first pulled into the pitiful shapes of grief and then into another more distressing emotion which followed.

Helen said sharply, "Watch out, Pauline, don't let yourself pour over."

But Pauline was pouring over, crying and reviling in immature fury and phraseology, making no attempt to maintain her self-control. It was absolute hypocrisy, she sobbed, for everybody to be looking so shocked and horrified now, because everybody in the unit hated him, everybody was always so mean to him, always and always, all his life, just because he had had the misfortune to be so much cleverer than anybody else, just because he was further along than anybody. They had all hated him and been horribly, unspeakably jealous of him.

Such naked emotional exposure always leaves you uncomfortable, particularly if you are in a group when it occurs.

And this embarrassment was climaxed by another.

Tom Morse rose, holding awkwardly a salad plate and a half-eaten roll and a glass of milk. He looked around at us all as his grandfathers must have gathered in the attention of their sinning congregations, and his voice as he spoke sounded like that of an older man of force, of abnormal fervor. "Because there was wrath," he declared, "He hath taken away with a stroke. He has delivered the first of us to the antagonist, to the Evil One, and a great ransom cannot free our brother from the everlasting flames."

A sermon was about to be pronounced. It was coming and you had the paralyzing sensation of being obliged to sit and listen, of being pinned down, unable to get away.

Pauline turned to Tom Morse and slapped him on the cheek. She cried, "Don't you *dare* say that Ames has been turned over to the Evil One."

Beside me Dr. Lajoie gasped as if checking a laugh. He said under his breath, "The comic element introduced at the moment of intolerable tension."

Now everybody was getting up, moving about, talking with excitement.

Jeffrey came toward me, quickly, from the dining room. I crossed over to him and he said, "Anne, you and I had better go down with Dr. Julian and look into this."

So we three went out of the side door, quietly, leaving confusion behind.

Dr. Julian and Jeffrey and I crossed the Dejons' back yard and then the Julians' lawn, where the shadows were longer and the yellow rubber horse still lay beside the pool.

Fifteen minutes later we three stood ringing the front doorbell of the house where Ames Auger roomed. A tall thin woman, very frightened, appeared and asked us if we would mind going around through the yard to the side entrance. It was always open and we could just go up the stairs to Mr. Auger's room on the second floor. We followed her directions and stood beside the bed and looked with pity upon what remained of Ames Auger, Ph.D.; a young man with mouse-colored hair and, unhappily, a sharp and petulant and almost disagreeable face. I thought it too bad that one should die with quite that expression. One should have more serenity and kindliness, one should look as if one heard the golden trumpets blowing and saw St. Peter smiling at the gate.

I was sorry that Tom Morse's portentous sentences crossed my mind.

"Because there was wrath . . . He has delivered the first of us to the antagonist, to the Evil One."

The small room was dominated by the presence of the dead; and this oppressiveness of atmosphere was made the heavier by Dr. Julian's emotion, which seemed to me strange and offering no explanation or analysis. It was as if the old man were angry and childishly unwilling to accept the fact of death. He kept saying, almost crazily, to Jeffrey, "McNeill, it can't be. There must be some mistake! Are you sure, McNeill? Can't anything be done? I simply cannot let him go now. . . ." Then, horrifyingly, he leaned over the bed, took the body by the shoulders, and actually shook it, ordering, "Auger, Auger–listen to me–wake up!"

One can imagine what the boy's head did under that treatment.

Jeffrey stopped that, and I turned away from the scene.

Behind me Dr. Julian said in a broken voice, "He was the most brilliant student of all my experience."

I wished that I had done more for this boy, that I had known him better. It was sorrowful and wrong that a person of his value had had to live so forlornly, in such a poor, small room, so dusty and ill furnished. Its only touches of pleasantness were a few paper-covered mystery stories and a small, scraggly geranium. There was a battered typewriter on the table. His possessions represented such a meager, unfulfilled life.

For an instant my glance rested on the table by the head of the bed, on its lamp with a cracked parchment paper shade, on an untidy pile of magazines and a bottle of phenobarbital tablets, and, seeing that bottle, I felt apprehension like a bitter drop in temperature that leaves one shivering and sick.

Then an open sheet of paper on the bureau caught my attention and I went over and picked it up.

It was typewritten. The text was as follows:

"My dear Colleagues,

"As you must all realize, our research relative to X, undertaken with such high spirits, has failed. The mass spectrograph results show no separation. Let us be thankful. This is the end, I hope, to the greatest menace to civilization yet dreamed of by man. Unfortunately for me, some demon has shown me, alone, the way to go on to consummation. I cannot face the responsibility. I have cut out and burned certain pages in my notebook. This will have to be explained to the F.B.I.

"I see no other way than this. I have taken an overdose of the tablets beside my bed."

I said, "Jeffrey, here is a note he left."

He demanded sharply, "You didn't read it, did you?" and nearly snatched it from my hand. Anyone would have been hurt at his manner.

I heard an unexpected, deep sob.

Dr. Julian was sitting on the bed beside the body. His head was bent far over and he was crying, saying, "McNeill–McNeill–it's lost now! Just when we had our finger tips on it! And he hadn't discussed it with me yet. I suppose he hadn't it ready. If I'd only known I should have had copies. Now it's totally lost and we'll never get it."

Jeffrey said, "We'll have to get his notebook at once."

"Yes. We'll have to hurry to the laboratory and look through the safe and find it. God, McNeill, think of what he has done!"

I said, "If you are going up to the laboratory, Jeffrey, I think I'll go home, unless there is something I can do for you."

Jeffrey looked at me as if he were not aware who I was. He said yes, he thought I had better go, if I didn't mind taking the bus back, and Dr. Julian said, "Don't mention a word about this, Joan, to anybody under any circumstances."

I went home by the bus, in sorrow for the boy and

Pauline who had loved him, irritation at Jeffrey who had been so abrupt with me, and indignation at Dr. Julian who had seemed so much more upset about the loss of some scientific data than the loss of a life. Somebody should return and tell Pauline what she wanted to know, but since Dr. Julian had ordered me not to mention a word of what I had seen there was no use for me to go back to the Dejons'. And perhaps someone had taken Pauline back to her room.

The party would scarcely go on after this.

It was on the next day that Jeffrey started off on his trip to New York and Washington and perhaps to New Mexico. He had shown determined and brusque reluctance to discuss Auger's death or any of the circumstances attending it. When I asked him why Dr. Julian had been so upset about the burned pages he had almost bitten my head off and told me to forget I had ever read the note on the bureau. Then, with contrition, he had kissed me and rumpled my hair affectionately, apologized, and said that it was a bad business and he didn't know when he would be home.

Shortly after he left, the ring arrived and then the clips, and there had occurred the incident of the bank balance.

And here I was now locked in a strange bedroom waiting for a man who wanted to know what I knew about the missing pages—who said it was a good thing to have the water so handy; that "they"—meaning of course bodies—never floated if attached to a weight.

V

I LAY on the bed in the locked bedroom and wondered how it would be if, when that companion of Zunyer's came for me with his revolver, I should say, "I should like first to speak to Mr. Zunyer," and go downstairs and tell him all I knew about Auger's death and the note and what Dr. Julian had said and what Jeffrey had said and perhaps be able to invent enough more to satisfy them. Perhaps he would let me go then and I might be home in time to have breakfast with Michael instead of floating, dead, in the Sound.

I had not realized that I was so terrified, that I wanted so, with all my body and soul, to be out of this place and safely home. I found myself trembling, sitting up on the side of the bed with my teeth chattering. I thought, "I'll bang on the floor and then they'll come up and I'll tell them. And if that doesn't work I'll promise not to tell Jeffrey a thing that has happened tonight."

I got up from the bed then and went toward the door, and in the mirror I saw a strange woman in an expensive green and silver afternoon dress, but a woman with a coward's face. I stopped a second, shocked at myself, and was ashamed. I thought of what Jeffrey had told me, to forget that I had ever read Auger's letter. As I stood before the mirror I knew that Dr. Julian and his unit were engaged upon some project of extraordinary importance, that Jeffrey was in on it, and that no matter what happened to me I must not betray them by one word.

Then my attention came back to this house and to what might be happening in it. I listened and heard water running somewhere for a bath, and from downstairs heard low voices. Outside there was a sound of wind in the pine trees.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was half past one.

Something in my mind said, "Are you going to sit here and wait until that man comes and murders you? Get up and do something. Get away."

So I tried the doorknob, very quietly, but the door was locked. I opened the closet door and, seeing the clothes hangers, I had an idea.

I thought, with my heart beating heavily, "Perhaps I can make a wire ladder! Why did I waste that time lying on the bed! Why didn't I think of it before? They'll be up at any minute to take me out and strangle me and tie a weight around me, and Jeffrey will never know what has happened to me, and he and Michael will wonder all the rest of their lives, and I shall be a skeleton at the bottom of the Sound."

I was nearly weeping for him and for Michael and for myself, too, as I sat on the side of the bed with clothes hangers all about.

I had to experiment as to the best way to twist the hooks around the frames, to tighten and tighten the wire so that the separate hangers would not pull away from each other beneath my weight. I thought, "I'd give fifty thousand dollars for a pair of pliers," but no guest room supplies those with its furnishings. There was the clock key. That might help me. I tiptoed across the floor, got the gilt key, and found that by putting the end of the wire hook into the key's hole I got more purchase and leverage and could make a much tighter winding. The ladder lengthened. It had loops instead of steps and my feet might be badly pinched; the whole device might disintegrate and let me fall and break a leg, but it was worth trying at least.

Now the voices downstairs seemed to have stopped and I was deathly afraid that at any minute I should hear steps coming down the hall to my door.

I turned the lamp low and blew it out. Then I went to the window and struggled with the screen. I thought, "I can't push it up. It's stuck. It's painted stuck. It's impossible!" But one has extra strength given one at moments of peril. I was able to move it and was more terrified than ever at its vindictive squeak.

The question now was where to attach my ladder.

There were shutters. I untwisted the whole top loop and bent it around and around the shutter hinge, praying that the wire would hold. I then dropped the ladder down, climbed onto the window sill, and let myself out backward into the darkness, feeling below for the first loop with my foot.

I kept expecting to see the door of my room open and let in light from the hall, to see the man Pierre standing there with his gun.

My foot found the loop and I let myself down; the loop pulled and tightened, but held. I reached down another long step and another and my head was below the window sill. In a moment I had to take my hands off its firm support and that was difficult, hard to hold onto the slender nothingness of the wire, to be scraped against the house. I realized that the ladder went in front of another window, and although no light came streaming from that now, what if Zunyer or his man heard sounds and lighted a lamp and saw me outside, clinging like a vampire!

It is not easy to climb down a series of flimsy, swaying loops.

I thought, "I'm really going to make it!" and at that moment one of the hangers parted somewhere above me and I was dropped, with wire all over and around me, into a prickly small tree whose bending stem and branches partially broke my fall to the ground.

But still I fell heavily and lay twisted on one arm and shoulder and my wrist hurt madly again. I felt shaken and utterly weak and I wanted to burst into tears and have someone pick me up and take care of me and give me whisky or a strong cup of tea. But I realized that if I wanted to live I must not lie there and pity myself and wait to be taken care of. I must make an effort, and that at once. I turned myself over onto my hands and knees and crawled out from among the ornamental planting into which I had dropped.

If Zunyer and Pierre were on the way up to my room, if they found the screen out of the window and the wire dangling from the shutter hinge, they would look out and surely spot me below.

With this peril goading me I rose to my feet and ran faster than I had since I was a child playing "white men and Indians," pursued by painted ephemeral braves about to cleave my head with brandished tomahawks. And how truly in those days I had imagined and reproduced terror —the fear heavy in your stomach, the clutch of dryness in your throat, and the stab of pain beneath your heart.

I crossed a stretch of lawn, reached a group of trees, and, crouching, came under their protection and a warm smell of pine. They were chiefly low evergreens growing thickly together. It was dark as a moth closet among them and when you stood you were so surrounded by branches and twigs that it was most difficult to move about. Bending lower, I looked back at the house. It was fairly large, a comfortable, spreading "summer residence," but there was not light enough from the stars for me to see it well, nor was there time for me to take in details. The room I had been locked in was still dark, as was the living room. Light shone from that which may have been the kitchen. I wondered if the two men were sitting at a table drinking courage from a bottle to nerve themselves for what they were planning to do. Pierre needed little or no stimulus, but Zunyer had been sincerely appalled, I thought, though not sufficiently to allow me to go alive.

I stood there for a minute or two feeling a little sick after my fall and the run across the lawn. My mind couldn't seem to grapple with the urgent problem of escape. I had to get further away from the house, and quickly. In a matter of moments they were sure to find that I had jumped or climbed from the room and then they would be out with flashlights and I would be found —and lost. Since we had come in a motorboat I felt sure that we must be on an island, probably one of the Melon Seed Islands in the Sound. On some of the Melon Seeds there are several houses, but on many there is only one house. I imagined that Zunyer was not a man who cared for neighbors. By some means I must get myself off the island at once and over to the mainland. But how, at this time of night?

The first thing to do was to put distance between me and the house. Turning my back on it, I pushed my way through trees. Pine and spruce needles brushed against my face, dry twigs scraped me and broke with alarmingly loud crackles. At first I walked on rugs of slippery needles and then as the trees thinned there was a surface of rock beneath my feet. Here trees grew in earth-filled cracks and there was space enough to see sky and stars. The ground slanted downhill and I hurried through a patch of low stuff that might have been low-bush blueberries and there was a smell of wild roses and of bayberry. Now a pale surface of rock slid into a steep decline. Darkness met its edge, and off and below in the distance I saw the flat, black-grayness of miles of water.

Off to the southeast, some eighteen miles away, was the Long Island shore. To the northeast—a mile away, I suppose—I saw lights on the Connecticut shore. Perhaps land was nearer to the south, but I couldn't see. As I turned toward it with wind blowing my hair and dress I saw the long strands of flashlights weaving about among the trees and I knew that my escape had been discovered.

I was afraid to climb down the steep side of the rock.

I stood there, terrified, not knowing where to go. Then unmistakably I heard footsteps coming nearer and nearer, furtively.

I thought, "I'll slide down the rock and drop into the water. It would be better to drown than to be caught."

It was too late. A figure came out from among the bushes. It was a small figure and it said, "Hi there!" in a voice a little above a whisper. "Watch out. Don't go down there, it's slippery." It was the boy Konrad in shorts and a sweater. He said, "They've found out how you got away. My father thinks you were frightfully clever, but Pierre is in a regular fury. You know what Pierre was planning to do to you, don't you? I was listening on the stairs."

I said, "Yes, I suppose I do know."

"Pierre is a very bad influence for my father," the boy whispered. "Come on down this path. Make it fast, please." His tough small hand took mine and he led me along a narrow path between rocks and bushes and under trees and then down an extremely steep place where we had to let ourselves down from one rock to another until I felt lichens under my fingers and heard the suck and lap of water close below me, and as we still climbed we scraped against barnacles and I smelled the cool smell of wet seaweed and wave-wet stone. Then we stood on the damp sand of a very small beach and near us, beyond some rocks, was the shadowy form of a little square-ended dinghy.

The boy said quietly, with pride, "This is my own boat. I think I may be able to row you ashore. It's a long pull, but I have done it before, going over for butter and eggs, and the water is fairly calm tonight." He went around behind the rocks and as he came to the dinghy he kicked aside some large, queerly shaped object that fell on the sand with a plop. He pushed the dinghy into the water. Its bottom ground over sand.

I said, "This is a very brave thing you are doing, Konrad."

"Oh no, it isn't," he said. "It just seemed the only thing to do so that my father wouldn't agree to Pierre's doing something foolish. I suppose I'm acting like John Hutardo's cat, but it seemed to me I had to save my father from being an accessory after the fact, don't you think so?" He sounded worried and unhappy.

I said that I did think so, indeed.

"Actually he liked you a lot, Mrs. McNeill, and he wasn't at all happy about what Pierre was absolutely de*term*ined to do. . . . If you'll get in the stern now . . . I'm sorry. I'm afraid you'll get your feet wet."

I said that that was a small matter and stepped into the water. I pushed off the boat, put a knee on the stern, and got in.

Konrad rowed us along, keeping as close as he could to the island, which rose steeply from the water at this side. Looking up, I saw flashlight shafts playing this way and that.

"Gosh, Pierre certainly is dead set to get you," the boy said. "You know this isn't a very nice situation for me to be in."

I said, "How do you happen to be in on it? It isn't usual for a person of your age."

"Just because my father happens to have a different sort of business from other people's fathers isn't any reason why he can't have a normal home life." He spoke with a tired indignation. "And all the time what he wants is just to have a normal life without any intrigue or adventure or anything, but he says he thinks it is abnormal for him to be normal. It's very sad, I think."

We were still skirting close to the dark island.

Konrad said, "Mrs. McNeill, would you mind tying this handkerchief over your eyes, please? I'll take you to shore but I can't have you knowing where we live and sending police back for Pierre. You see, don't you? Is that okay?"

I said that it was and leaned forward to take the handkerchief he handed me. I suppose it was a foolish point of honor that impelled me to tie it tightly over my eyes.

There was darkness, the choppy motion of the dinghy, the sound of the water, of the oarlocks, of the oars dipping rhythmically, and of the child's tired voice going on and on in pathetic explanation and justification of his father. His father was really the most wonderful and the kindest man in the world, he assured me, and it was sickening that they could never seem to manage the kind of life they liked. They had had to spend such a lot of time abroad when they really liked the United States much the best. Konrad's mother was an American and her family was much, much more normal but not nearly so exciting as his father's. Once in 1937 his father had been so determined to live a normal life that he had bought a chicken farm near Aunt Hilda's house on Long Island and for a while it was great fun. The chickens shed a lot of feathers and Konrad picked them up and a maid they had then showed him how to paint them and she made an Indian suit for him. It was much too small for him now but he still had it. It was one of the nicest things he had ever owned. It would have been fun to keep on living there but the chickens got something called coccidiosis and there were the most tremendous casualty lists from the henyard every morning and Konrad's father got so discouraged he almost wanted to drown himself but a telegram came just in time.

I asked, "What was in the telegram, Konrad?"

"Oh, just some more of the same sort of projects and stuff that he's always used to; something about oil and rubber and going to Burma again, so he went right off, and Mother went to Florida with my grandmother and they left me with Aunt Hilda."

"Where was that?" I asked.

"Just down on Long Island."

The boy managed, politely, to evade any question I asked.

I heard him yawn and then the rowing stopped.

"Are you very tired?" I asked.

"Only a little, thanks. I seem to get tired easily. They said at the Bund camp that I hadn't any stamina, but I don't think they were right, do you, Mrs. McNeill? I think it's just because I don't sleep very well."

I said that I thought he had more stamina than almost any boy I had ever known. I hoped my son, Michael, would have as much.

That seemed to please him. The rowing began again, with more vigor. Presently he said, "I hope you won't mind my giving you fifty cents, Mrs. McNeill. I brought it for your bus fare. We're almost there now, and when you get on shore please keep on the handkerchief until you've counted five hundred by five, slowly. Then you can take it off and just go on up the road. I don't quite know where you'll find a bus but you're sure to sometime or other. . . . Now here we are. Do you mind moving over while I get out and pull up the boat?"

In a moment or two he was helping me out of the dinghy, giving me directions about where to put my feet and how to step up the little incline of shore. Water soaked through my shoes and squelched as he led me up through mud.

"Okay now," he said. "So long, Mrs. McNeill, good luck."

I said, "Good-by, Konrad. Thank you. You're right about wanting to be normal. Stick to it."

"Okay, I'll try."

I heard the sound of oars receding and receding slowly as if the rower were almost too tired to move.

"Five, ten, fifteen, twenty . . ." I counted up to five hundred and took the handkerchief off my eyes. I stood on the shore of a small cove where there seemed to be, in the predawn grayness, reeds and marsh grass and a mist over the water, but no sign of a small boy in a boat.

VI

It was half past five when I walked up Stanley Street toward my own house. I had been fortunate on leaving the cove to follow two or three side roads and eventually, after about a mile and a half, to find a highway and prevail upon a bus to stop and take me on. Now I was almost home, exhausted, disheveled, but safe.

There was sunlight sifting through the maple trees, and a robin sat on the lilac bush behind which Zunyer had hidden the evening before. I agreed with him, in a passionate appreciation of normality. My kitchen key was where we hide it on the back piazza. I let myself in and tiptoed through the dining room to the front of the house.

A man's footsteps moved about upstairs in my room. I stood at the foot of the stairs and looked up as Jeffrey came running down.

In that first second of seeing him I thought he looked like a man whose whole family have just met violent death. Then he saw me.

He said, "Anne—I've been nearly crazy. I just got back and found you weren't here. My God—darling—what has happened to you!"

I saw myself in the dark steel mirror in the hall and I did not wonder that he was horrified. I'm afraid that I did rather go to pieces then, leaning against the very modern stair rail and weeping until he put his arms around me and my head on his shoulder. He was sweet, and frantic with alarm, too.

I managed to say, "I'm all right, darling. Nothing drastic happened, absolutely; they were just going to drown me and put a weight on me but I was frightfully clever and made a ladder of clothes hangers and climbed out and fell into a juniper bush or something and escaped and then a little boy, Zunyer's boy, rowed me ashore."

Jeffrey got me to a deep chair in the living room, sat me down, and rushed into the pantry and brought back a roll and some whisky. He said, "Now take this and tell me what happened. For God's sake, Anne, be as lucid as you can. What was it all about?"

I said, "I didn't know. That was the absolutely insane thing. They were trying to get some information out of me. I hadn't the remotest notion what until Zunyer mentioned missing pages——"

"But where were you? Who was Zunyer that he knew anything about any missing pages?"

"He was the man who kidnaped me. There was another little rat of a person but Zunyer was the leader, of a very different class. I think we must have been on one of the Melon Seed Islands. I got the bus home about two miles beyond the town line of Kingsford, I do know that much. But, Jeffrey, Zunyer gave me the strangest password."

"What was it?"

"U-235."

He looked appalled and said again, "My God!" which indicated extreme agitation in Jeffrey. He said, "Don't ever mention that, Anne, don't ever say it aloud."

I was irritated. I told him that that was exactly what

Zunyer had said and I still couldn't make head nor tail out of anything except that in some way the kidnaping might tie in with the pages Ames Auger had cut out of his notebook. The same phrase had cropped up in two extraordinarily dissimilar episodes. That was all I knew.

I ate my roll and drank the whisky slowly while I talked and my elbows and knees began to go weak and I began to feel intolerably sleepy and dazed. But Jeffrey was demanding that I tell him exactly what had happened and was keeping me at it, questioning me with ruthless, swift insistence.

I protested, "Darling, you've got the story now—call the police, do anything you want to about it. But you're home and that is all I care about and I am going upstairs to sleep for a week." I was so tired that my heart thudded.

"You can't go to bed," he said. "You've got to take one strong cup of coffee and come off with me and find the man Zunyer, whoever he is. First I'll telephone Bard of the F.B.I. to bring down some road maps and coast charts and you'll have to tell us as well as you can where you were taken. Then we'll go off."

I nearly wept again. I said, "Jeffrey, I simply cannot. This time the horse is lying down in the shafts. It is absolutely done in."

He was standing in front of my chair. He leaned over, took my hands in his, and looked down into my eyes. He said, "Look, Anne. If that man Zunyer is not caught, if those missing pages were not burned and some Judas in the unit turns them over to Zunyer, it is probable that you and I will see New York and Washington and Boston in ruins and the Axis running the world."

"My dear, you are crazy. Completely, or I am drunk. You've been off careening around the country with Superman and Flash Gordon, not with a dark-haired enchantress at all."

He sat on the arm of the chair for a moment and said, "My dear, who said I was going about the country with a dark enchantress?"

"I don't know who said it originally. Helen Haleck suggested it, but humorously with a light touch."

He said, "I wonder why she hates you so. . . . Well, that's something that can wait." He went to the bottom of the stairs and shouted to Mary that Mrs. McNeill had come home and needed some strong coffee at once.

There followed a half hour of extreme confusion and activity. Michael woke up and came tearing downstairs in blue pajamas, shouting, "Mummy, Daddy, Mummy, Daddy," in the heights of joy. Mary appeared, looking sleepy but capable. Jeffrey vanished into the telephone closet and called Mr. Bard, the F.B.I. man, from his sleep. I went upstairs, took a shower, and dressed as fast as I could, putting on a dark green sport dress appropriate for any emergency. When I came downstairs Jeffrey and Mr. Bard had charts and maps spread out on the dining-room table and Michael was sitting in Jeffrey's chair eating zwieback and looking enchanting.

Jeffrey introduced Mr. Bard to me. He was a smallish person who looked as if he had been turned out on an assembly line of nice little worried businessmen.

I'm afraid I was a great disappointment to him and to Jeffrey too because I was able to be definite about neither Zunyer's island nor the cove to which Konrad had rowed me, nor even about the roads I had taken from the shore to the bus. Looking at the shore charts, I realized that Zunyer's house might have been on one of the Hen and Chicken Islands, if not on a Melon Seed.

"There must be over thirty islands in those two groups," Mr. Bard said glumly.

"I think it was on one of the farthest from the shore because they didn't seem to have electricity. They used kerosene lamps," I said.

Even this crumb of information seemed to cheer the men a little. They decided that we would drive to Brodford Bay, have a Coast Patrol speedboat pick us up there and take us around the islands.

I said, "Well, I certainly hope I'll recognize it when I see it. I was blindfolded both coming and going and it was pitch-dark."

Mr. Bard said, "I'll have our office call up all the real estate men who handle houses on the Melon Seeds and the Hen and Chickens and make inquiries about Zunyer. We ought to get some line on him by the time we reach Brodford Cove. We'll have one or two good husky specimens from the state police come with us too."

I still thought that Jeffrey and now this Mr. Bard were being melodramatic, but Mary had brought me an egg as well as some very good coffee so I felt less like caving in at any minute and more acquiescent.

Jeffrey went upstairs, came back with his pistol, and impatiently drank a cup of coffee while Mr. Bard telephoned instructions to some subordinate whom he routed out of bed.

It was still only quarter of seven when Jeffrey and I drove off in our convertible roadster.

Mr. Bard was following behind us in his own car.

I said, "Jeffrey, I'm sure that Helen Haleck doesn't hate me." I had been thinking about that remark of his, and it had hurt.

"No woman makes that sort of statement without the intention of injury," he answered.

But I still didn't think so. Helen Haleck was one who would say the unexpected. Nor did I think she had malice toward me.

Jeffrey said, "Anne, I brought back permission from certain men in Washington to have you sworn in to Dr. Julian's unit."

I said, "Darling, why should I want to be?"

He drove for a few minutes very fast, saying nothing. Then he began to talk quietly but with a tense sincerity.

He said, "Anne, we are dealing with matters so vast that they are completely beyond the scale of any former experience in the history of the world. We haven't a vocabulary or emotions to cope with them. I wanted you to be sworn in when I was, but they wouldn't permit it because you aren't a scientist. However, you are sanctioned now so I can explain a little at least. . . . Have you any idea at all what Dr. Julian's unit is working on?"

"Not the slightest—unless it's a rocket ship in which you are all going to embark to reach the moon."

I think it was good of him not to be infuriated at me but I doubt if he even heard that flippant remark.

He said, "They are working on an atomic bomb. It is permissible for me to explain some of the fundamentals of the problem, but after this we won't discuss it again. No member of the unit ever mentions uranium by name. It is called X if one has to refer to it. Now I can only give you the barest suggestion of an explanation, but try to take it in."

Then as he drove he told me this, which I have boiled down and am giving in my own words.

It seems that before the beginning of the war all scientists knew that the era of atomic energy was near. Now uranium is the heaviest of the elements and is not one thing but a mixture, whose parts are called the isotopes of uranium. The principal isotope is designated as U-238, but a lighter isotope, U-235, is always present although in comparatively small quantities. The problem was to make a separation, to divide the uranium in such a way that one part should be richer in U-235 than the other. If such a process could be developed scientists knew that they could proceed toward the practical use of atomic power.

For centuries men have been dreaming of splitting the atom and experimenting toward that end. It was the great hope of the ancient alchemists that someday they might discover the secret of turning baser metals into gold, although they did not know that to change copper, for instance, into gold would take an enormous amount of energy, whereas changing gold into copper would release energy.

The uranium atom, like all others, is composed of a central nucleus like a sun, about which circle negative electrons as the planets circle our sun. The heavier the atom, the more complex its nucleus and the greater the number of electrons circling around. The nucleus is composed of positrons and neutrons.

If an atom is split, the nucleus divides into two parts, which form at least two lighter atoms with the possibility of a few superfluous neutrons left over. Uranium, as the heaviest atom, is the most complex and therefore possibly the easiest to break up. An atom can be split by bombardment by neutrons. Uranium is bombarded by neutrons if exposed to radium in the presence of beryllium, but the neutrons must be moving at a speed much slower than their normal movement. It was discovered that they could be retarded by the use of graphite, water, or paraffin. If one of these slowed neutrons hit a U-235 atom, that atom would divide, giving off additional neutrons to smash other U-235 atoms. If, however, there was too much U-238 present, that would absorb the neutrons and stop the process. The problem was to have a sufficient concentration of U-235 so that the process would not stop.

Many ways had been suggested for the concentration of U-235, and all over the country in different universities groups of scientists were investigating these methods. It was known that this was being done in Germany and there was no doubt whatever that the country who first developed this power and produced atomic bombs would win the war. The devastation would be beyond imagination as would be the results upon the future—its effect upon international relationships and industry and civilization itself.

Jeffrey said, "There are, of course, many foreign agents trying to find out what our units are accomplishing. Zunyer is one of these Nazi agents——"

I said, "I think he's a Spaniard, Jeffrey."

"It may be. However, obviously someone thought you knew what was being done in Julian's unit and told this to Zunyer and told him also that you would sell it out. I suppose the person who told Zunyer didn't quite want to play the Judas himself but was not averse to putting you in that position. I wonder if he really thought you would tell anything, under pressure, or if he just sold you out to Zunyer for a good price, or if it was all sheer maliciousness toward you."

I said, "Jeffrey, who is such an enemy of mine?"

"We'll have to take that up next," he said. "Now do you see why I sounded like Superman and talked about New York in ruins?"

"I do see," I told him. "But is Dr. Julian's unit anywhere near the solution of this problem?"

"I don't know," he answered. "Ames Auger certainly believed he was and Julian thinks he may well have been, but none of the workers do know really what is being accomplished because of the extreme secrecy that is being observed. The men in some larger units, for instance, haven't even the least idea what their colleagues in the next room are doing. There are a few co-ordinators at the top who do, I suppose, know the whole process. They have armed guards in constant attendance."

I asked, "What is your function in all this, Jeffrey?"

"Intelligence and liaison man, and I do a bit of laboratory work with Julian as well. . . . Now what we have to do is to get our hands on Zunyer and find out which person in the unit is working against it." Then he added bleakly, "It is serious inefficiency on my part to have this happening and it may have incalculably disastrous results."

His expression was set in lines of strain and unhappiness and he was driving faster and faster along the Post Road. I slid down a little, rested my head on the back of the seat, and closed my eyes.

VII

I MUST HAVE SLEPT for a few minutes because I woke hearing Jeffrey saying, "What this development of Zunyer's seems to indicate is that possibly Ames Auger cut out those pages from his notebook and did not burn them, and that someone in the unit knows this. If the notes for the completion of the process were there and were as conclusive as Julian thinks they may well have been, then we absolutely must find the pages. It is, as I say, conceivable that one of the members of the unit has them and, if so, is it the same person who sold you out to Zunyer? It's the devil of a situation all around."

I opened my eyes and said, "Jeffrey, was it about the pages that you went down to Washington and Chicago this last time?"

"That and other matters in connection with the unit," he answered. "It appears it would have been better if I had stayed at home on the job. But Julian wanted me to go."

We were by now almost at Brodford, where we were to turn down to the cove and meet the speedboat and the state police. But we still had three or four miles, so I shut my eyes again and thought of the people in the unit, wondering which one could possibly have been in touch with Zunyer.

Dr. Julian, the head? Who could doubt him? His reputation, his personality, his conventionality and prestige set him above question.

Lejoie, the intellectual, the patriot, the inheritor and upholder of fine traditions? You would think that he too could be eliminated, but then I knew actually little about Dr. Lajoie and couldn't tell what he would do under pressure of temptation or what form his temptations would take. The devil provides appropriate offerings for everyone's taste.

And there was Walter Dejon, brilliant but not quite brilliant enough for his wife's and his own ambitions. Walter was impulsive, mercurial, with fundamental honesty, I was sure, but perhaps also fundamental weakness. One could not pin one's faith upon Walter without an uneasy feeling that perhaps the pin might open under stress and let things slip.

Helen Haleck? Until Jeffrey had said that she was animated by a spirit of malice when she suggested the dark enchantress, I should have thought Helen was a friend to be relied on come hell or high water. She had seemed to me a person of complete and undeviating integrity; but perhaps I was mistaken. Perhaps I did not judge her correctly. It might be that if I met her in some environment other than our rigid New England scientific setting she would have appeared a much more exotic, more complex woman; unpredictable. She might be one of these chameleon individuals, taking on the color of the material upon which she is placed.

And as for Torgerson, who seemed so good and so sorrowful and so kindly, I suppose it was conceivable that, instead of having lost his wife and son through the brutality of the Nazis, he might actually be a Nazi agent himself telling a convincing tale.

Pauline Dunbar? What of Pauline? A "nice girl" and a pretty one. I had liked her but not known her well. It seemed improbable that as secretary to Dr. Julian she should know enough about the work of the unit to be able to give much information away. But at that the information hadn't been given away. I was to have been the one to supply that. I suppose Pauline could have thought that I knew all the secrets Dr. Julian might have told Jeffrey. Reluctantly I came to the conclusion that Pauline was a possibility.

And young Sam Talbert too, with his ideology which scorned patriotism and held in high regard only pure science and internationalism. I should think a mind such as his would rather readily accept the approaches of a person like Zunyer.

But Tom Morse was above suspicion. Poor good young Tom Morse, distracted and tormented; no one could believe ill of him.

"There's the speedboat," Jeffrey said. "All right now, Anne. Just try to pull up to the surface everything you can remember about the geography of last night."

There was the water of Brodford Cove before us: a wide inlet edged by summer cottages. Our road ended at a dock and there was a long gray motorboat with no name, but the numbers 6-G541. Three state policemen, the man who had brought the boat, and two other men awaited us on the dock. The two latter turned out to be real estate men. But we found, as we all stood about and discussed the matter, that they had never heard of any family named Zunyer. Nobody of that name had rented or bought a house on any one of the Hen and Chickens or the Melon Seed Islands.

One of the men said, "Zunyer may, of course, have sublet from somebody, but it'll take some time to find out. Or he may have a house on one of the Captain Smith islands; they're five miles farther along east."

I said, "No, I'm sure those are too far. I don't think it could have been on one of the Captain Smiths."

"Well," Jeffrey said, "let's get going and have a look around the Melon Seeds first."

If my mind had not been borne down by thoughts of a world on the brink of destruction I might have enjoyed the trip. The boat thrust itself through sunlight and wind and blue water. It leapt ahead while waves parted and spread out in white foam behind. We passed fishermen in rowboats and sped past sailboats and I thought, fleetingly, what fun it would be, if we survived the next few years, for Jeffrey and me to have a sailboat of our own.

Ahead of us were the Melon Seeds. Some of these islands are several acres in extent and on these are communities of small houses. It seemed improbable that Zunyer should have chosen to live in one of these, crowded among inquisitive neighbors, so we concentrated on the smaller islands. Some of these were little more than rocks, inhabited by gulls. But there were many upon which there were two or three houses and a few with only one.

Mr. Bard, Jeffrey, and I stood in the bow of the cockpit. The owner of the 6-G541 had brought along a pair of field glasses which the men hoped would be useful to me. I had told them all I could think of about the house. It seemed to be of moderate size. It had no electricity and so must be one of the ones farthest from the mainland. There was no piazza roof under the room in which I had been locked, and since that room was over the living room, and the living room would be apt to have an outlook across the Sound, then the bedroom was doubtless on the south side, and I knew it had been toward the east. So we must look for a moderate-sized house on an island with no others, a house that had no piazza on the southeast side. There was the ornamental planting into which I had fallen; there was a short lawn across which I had run, the bit of woods where I had hidden, and then the steep rocky drop to the water. We must search for these distinctive characteristics.

We came to the islands and wove our way about them and I looked through the glasses and then Jeffrey and Bard looked but we couldn't find one that answered that description at all.

"Must be on one of the Hen and Chickens then," one of the state policemen suggested. They and the owner of the boat sat behind us. I don't know how much of my story they knew but they were extremely interested in our chase.

So we turned west toward the Hen and Chickens, and Mr. Bard, who was a pessimistic soul, said it was getting so late now that Zunyer would surely have skipped out and that they probably never would find his house, I could give so vague a description.

But the Hen and Chicken Islands seemed to offer no such house as the one we were looking for.

"We'll try the Captain Smith group now," Mr. Bard said, but those were so far away I knew that Konrad never could have rowed from them.

One of the state police thought we must have missed the right place at the Melon Seeds; we had better try there again. So we went roaring back again farther offshore and passed the first Melon Seed, where there was one large white house, and the second island, where there were three, two white and a yellow, and then we went between two very small ones with bungalows, and in the distance we saw a larger island with two houses on it, one of which had a vaguely familiar shape.

"But it can't be that," I said, looking through the glasses, and then I knew that it was. Dangling from a shutter hinge on the southeast corner was a wire loop. I said, "That's it. We've found it, Jeffrey," and was very glad to see the look of relief on his face.

In five minutes we had landed. I had time then, as we walked up the path, to be unhappy about Konrad. It was not pleasant to think what his opinion would be of me.

I needn't have worried. The house was locked and there was no one there. The police broke through a window and let us in. You could see that people had taken hurried departure. There was food in the icebox; emptied bureau drawers were left half open; beds had not even been made. Everything of a personal nature seemed to have been taken. There was nothing left in any wastebasket, and burned papers in the living-room fireplace had been pounded into ash. Only in the boy's room there were three books of comics on the floor and in the closet a pathetic small Indian costume, gay with painted feathers.

Jeffrey was with me when I came upon this.

I said, "What a pity. He said he loved this so. He is a sweet boy, Jeffrey. It was made of feathers from the hens when his father had a chicken farm on Long Island. That was in 1937."

Jeffrey was looking at the suit. He pulled a gray feather from the headdress and looked at it. "Plymouth Rock," he said. "This may be a help."

"How?" I asked.

"We can find out who kept Plymouth Rocks on Long Island in 1937. I think most Long Island chickens are White Leghorns, so this narrows it down. And of course also we should be able to learn something about the Zunyers from the owners of this house."

We went into the room then where I had been locked, and I showed Jeffrey how I had made the ladder of coat hangers and where I had climbed down. He was gratifyingly impressed and thankful that I had not been badly hurt by the fall into the juniper.

We looked out of the window at the lawn and the trees where I had taken refuge and at the Sound stretching off toward the Long Island shore.

He said, "I wonder if we could find anything significant around the place anywhere. We might take a look, Anne."

We went downstairs and called to Bard, who was searching the cellar with the policemen. Then Jeffrey and I went out and crossed the lawn and made our way through the trees to the rock that dipped sharply over the island's edge. Near here we found the path where Konrad had led me, and now in the light of noontime it seemed a far shorter distance than we had gone the night before.

Here was the small beach and the dinghy, and behind the rocks was a large yellow object with black spots. It was made of rubber and it was not until Jeffrey went over to it and gave an exclamation that I realized what it was. It was a rubber bathing horse that looked as if it had inherited a strain of leopard blood.

Jeffrey stood looking at it and then he looked at me. He said, "This is a curious thing, Anne."

I said, "I suppose that was what Konrad kicked out of the way last night. I wondered vaguely what it was when it plopped on the sand."

Jeffrey said, "Have you seen it before?"

I had to admit, miserably, that I had, at the Julians' pool.

It had a surgeon's plaster patch under the left eye.

We didn't discuss it then. I think we were both feeling too unhappy about the possible implications. Jeffrey took the horse and we climbed back up the rocks as we had come.

"I doubt if there is anything further to do here," he said.

VIII

WE ARRIVED back in town, having picked up a sandwich or two for lunch on the way. We had to stop at Mr. Bard's office for me to make out papers for the F.B.I. They were the longest, most exhaustive interrogations I had ever had to answer: searching questions about all the schools I had ever been to, the places and houses I had lived in, the jobs I had held, why I had left these jobs, all the trips I had taken, the foreign countries I had been to, the clubs and organizations I had ever joined, the dates appertaining to all these experiences, my political convictions, my vocations and avocations, my size, height, and general appearance, and my various illnesses.

Jeffrey and I sat in Mr. Bard's office and dug and delved into my past for two and a half hours. After we had signed long sheets and Mr. Bard had had in his secretary, who was a notary, and she had signed and he had signed, he said that everything was all in order. He had received instruction from Washington to swear me into Dr. Julian's unit immediately on completion of the papers without waiting for further investigations of my character.

I was, therefore, duly and impressively sworn in.

For ten or fifteen minutes then Jeffrey and Mr. Bard discussed Zunyer and how he was to be found; the possibility of the missing pages being still in existence and if so where; who had taken the yellow horse from the Julians' swimming pool to Zunyer's island; and who had sold me out. I sat listening, nearly dropping asleep in my chair.

Finally Mr. Bard said, "I know you and Mrs. McNeill are fast workers, but this investigation has to be done on the double."

"It has," Jeffrey agreed. "Come on, Anne, let's go."

So we went out and drove home with the spotted yellow horse sitting absurdly on my lap.

It was five o'clock when we reached the house. Michael met us with his face streaked and smeared with red and green and brown crayon and the information that he was "a Nindian, a terrible, ferocious, wild Nindian." Jeffrey swung him up to his shoulder and we went in the front door together and I was certainly glad to get home.

We had left the yellow horse in the car.

I said, "Jeffrey, I think I shall go right up to bed. I am simply out on my feet this time."

At least he had the grace to look sorry for me when he answered.

"It's a shame, Anne, but you can't. Lie down on the sofa for ten minutes and let Mary bring you a cup of tea."

I said, "Jeffrey, are we literally going to have to do this investigation on the double?"

"I'm afraid, my dear, that we are."

I went into the living room, stretched out on the long sofa, and closed my eyes. I had visions of Jeffrey and myself simply running pell-mell uphill and down all over the town, he carrying the spotted horse under one arm and I trailing, panting, utterly exhausted after him.

I said, "I can't do it. I shall, without exaggeration, die."

He sat on the sofa beside me and ran his fingers through my hair. He said, "Anne, this is a time when you and I can't take individual lives into consideration at all. They are utterly unimportant."

Then Mary came in with a tray and strong tea and small cheese sandwiches, and Michael bounced up and down on the end of the sofa and Jeffrey left us to telephone to find out whether Dr. Julian was at home or at the laboratory.

In twenty minutes I was partially restored by means of tea, hot water, a comb, and a clean blue dress. We were just about to drive to the laboratory to talk with Dr. Julian when a household crisis occurred. Jeffrey was in the car honking for me with impatience. So I hurried, and Michael came hurrying after me, slipped on the top stairs, fell, and came bumping down, howling and thudding. Mary came running out of the kitchen, wringing her hands and calling on the saints. I picked up Michael and shouted for Jeffrey. He ran in and we put the boy on the living-room sofa and Jeffrey made a quick and thorough examination. I have never been so frightened in my life.

"He wouldn't be howling like this if he were really hurt," Jeffrey told me above Michael's yells. "Have Mary put some cold water on his forehead and we'll go along."

But at this point I refused flatly. I said, "I am going to stay here until I see if he really is all right. I don't care if the universe cracks up beneath us. You go on and I'll follow in my own car as soon as I can."

He went off rather displeased with me and I stayed and held cold cloths to poor Michael's head and sang to him and comforted him until I saw that the extent of his hurt was no more than a large black-and-blue bump on his forehead. Then I told Mary I should have to go off and join Dr. McNeill, and I got my own small car out of the garage and drove down to the chemical laboratories.

The chemistry department of our university is housed in a building which should be on a dominating spot on a European hill instead of flatly in the midst of city streets. Ivy and Virginia creeper have done their best to make it look less like a hybrid and misplaced relic of medievalism but nothing can hide the battlements or the towers at each of the corners. The roof behind the battlements is thoroughly incongruous, being a sort of low mansard affair, slanting of course and of slate and having occasional dormer windows. The building is of gray stone constructed to last until the world cracks in ruins—which it well may, soon.

The entrance hall with its massive square pillars and long flight of wide stone steps impressed me somewhat as St. Peter's did, or Mont-Saint-Michel, or the Pennsylvania Railroad Station in New York. But I have never seen those buildings emptied of crowds, and here, since it was after hours, I was alone, climbing the stairs, wondering where Dr. Julian's laboratory was and how I could find it.

I came to the wide balcony of the first floor. Corridors extended away from this. The walls were lined with pictures of eminent chemists. I noticed Lavoisier and a quantity of bewhiskered Victorians. And besides these the scheme of decoration included glass wall cases filled with jars of chemicals of gay and attractive colors.

There was a smell of chemicals, a dominating smell of ether. I heard quick steps and someone whistling "Night and Day," and a student came down the hall. I asked him where Dr. Julian's laboratory was and he told me to go on up to the top and turn left, he thought, but he wasn't positive. He had never been up there himself. It was all very hush-hush indeed. Then he ran on down the stairs, his whistling receding, and I continued up and came to what I thought must be "the top" and turned to the left. Here there were yellow brick walls and as many doors as in a nightmare. I opened one into pitch-dark space filled only with the sound of dripping water, and another into a little lighted room furnished with a cot and a locker and a chart of a skeleton.

After going through more corridors I found another narrower flight of stairs, so I was not yet at the top. These led to a hall where several open doors let in actual daylight and gave a glimpse of small bedrooms cluttered with books and magazines, with unblackened windows and beyond them the battlements of the roof, then farther roofs of the city against a yellow evening sky.

A woman was coming down the hall toward me. It was Helen Haleck in a gray laboratory coat. I should think she must have been surprised to see me, but she didn't show surprise.

She said, "Hi, Anne, fancy meeting you here! This is very incriminating, my dear woman. Which graduate student have you come up to—see?" There was laughter behind her eyes.

I said, "Well, Helen, since you were here I thought they needed an older woman of good sterling principles to protect them—so I came up as chaperon."

We then with mutual amusement discarded the rapiers and went back down the hall and the stairs together, and I told her that I was now a member of her unit and she seemed pleased.

She said, "You weren't in this afternoon. I dropped over at about quarter of five and found Mary in a sad state of agitation. She said you and the doctor were off on one of your wild wolf chases all day and that you hadn't been home at all the night before and the doctor had come back and been nearly crazy."

"Poor Mary," I said. "She leads a hard life."

"You'd better warn her not to give away your guilty secrets. What were you up to, Anne darling, from the time you dropped me after the concert until the early hours?"

She had picked up her rapier again.

I said, "I went for a nice nocturnal ride with a fascinating Spanish gentleman," and looked at her, smiling a little, to watch her reaction.

She raised her eyebrows and said, "Well, of course then, after that you naturally wouldn't remember that you had asked me to come around to your house to tea this afternoon."

I had entirely forgotten it. That incident seemed five hundred years ago. I apologized and she accepted my apology and we went on amicably to Dr. Julian's office, where we found Jeffrey and Hans Torgerson.

Torgerson was smoking his pipe, sitting in a straight chair tipped back against the green steel safe. He got up as we came in and brought tall stools for Helen and me to sit on. Jeffrey was at Dr. Julian's desk, dialing numbers on the telephone. He nodded at me, asked how Michael was, spoke into the receiver, saying, "Is Dr.

Julian home yet? Have you any idea where I can reach him?" hung up, and dialed another number. He explained to me, "I can't locate him anywhere," and then went back to his telephoning.

I said to Helen, "You said last night that you wanted to talk to Jeffrey about the unit, that things weren't going well here."

"They aren't," she replied. "I should say they are in a condition of acute emotional crisis. The process seems to have failed, Dr. Julian is in despair, Lajoie goes about spurring us all on to greater and greater patriotic efforts, Walter is pallid and melancholy with love for you, the fires of hell smolder in poor Tom Morse, Pauline washes the keys of her typewriter with tears for Ames Auger, and Sammy Talbert watches her and glowers with jealousy even though Auger is safely dead."

Jeffrey put up the receiver and asked, "Why is Talbert jealous?"

"The best reason in the world, Dr. McNeill. The little charming Pauline was first engaged to marry him and she tossed him over the fence in favor of Ames Auger. Now, having lost Ames, wherein it is my opinion she was fortunate, she is trying to extend her lures and wiles to Tom Morse and Hans. She can't seem to make up her mind which of you is the more fascinating, can she, Hans dear? How stupid of her too."

Torgerson smiled a little and continued to smoke.

Jeffrey said, "Why do you think Pauline was fortunate to lose Ames Auger?"

"For the simple, fundamental reason that he was a thief and a robber and a very common scoundrel, Dr. McNeill."

Torgerson took the pipe out of his mouth and said, "Now, now, Helen, that is going a little too far. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*"

"That may be," she said, "but when I was a rebellious adolescent my speech and my conduct carried on a very successful revolution against the dictatorship of just such old gray-bearded slogans and rules. I have been emancipated from them ever since."

Jeffrey asked, "What reason have you, Helen, to say that Auger was a thief and a robber and a common scoundrel?" He asked this gravely, with some disapproval. He dislikes exaggerations, particularly those which are damaging.

I realized that Helen was being spurred by an injudicious excitement and that Torgerson was worried.

Her voice had an edge of tension as she answered, "Ames Auger stole Hans's idea about this process. It was Hans's idea, originally, not Auger's at all—the one he referred to in his suicide note."

"The one he meant when he said that some demon had shown him alone the way to consummation?" I asked.

"Exactly," she answered. "And what conceivable right had he to confiscate Hans's idea and work on it, work it up with his meretricious little flash-in-the-pan cleverness? Then he sat back and looked at it and became frightened—like a child, screaming with terror at his own jack-o'-lantern!"

"Now, now, Helen!" Torgerson tried to stop her. "Enough has been said now. Give over. It is best to let this fall."

"Why let it fall?" she insisted. "That's the trouble with you, Hans. You've always been a consistent defeatist, you let things drop, you exert no effort to hold them, to get there."

"But, my dear, why struggle to get there when it is all opaque before one and one has no conception of where one is trying to get?"

She was not to be deflected into a discussion of abstractions. She said, "And if Ames Auger did solve the problem of this process, by means of Hans's idea, who constituted him the judge of whether or not it was to be given to the world? What conceivable right had that little egotist to take such a decision upon his own shoulders? The little robber—the little drab coward—to destroy the chances of success of the unit!"

Jeffrey said, "Are the chances completely destroyed? If it was your idea in the first place, Torgerson, can't you continue with it?"

The Norwegian shrugged his shoulders and didn't answer.

Helen said, "He's given it up. That's what he's like: brilliant and able beyond anyone I have ever known, but a born relinquisher."

Torgerson was angry. You saw that in his eyes and the dull red that had come up into his face. The anger of Scandinavians is something to avoid.

Jeffrey said, "I presume, Torgerson, that Helen knows what she is saying about that idea being originally yours?"

"She knows, naturally," Torgerson answered. His Norwegian accent was more pronounced now than I had ever heard it. "Helen Haleck and I have no secrets from one another. But I am sorry that this has been mentioned. I did once talk with Auger of an idea I had about this process, but those thoughts of mine were in elementary stages. They may have amounted to nothing. Since then I have followed other lines suggested by Dr. Julian. What Auger did with my original idea I cannot tell. It was not patented, certainly. I lost interest in it and have not followed it out as perhaps I should. And as for the accusation that I am a defeatist, a relinquisher, I think, my dear Helen," he said quietly, looking at her in a way that made me feel chilled and uncomfortable, "that perhaps you do not know me as well as you imagine you do."

Jeffrey bridged a difficult moment by asking again, "But would it not be possible to develop your idea as Auger did?"

"I doubt it. I have no imagination as to the succeeding steps he followed. He was a brilliant young man. Far more so than I. It is that realization, I think, that has made our friend Dr. Haleck jealous and caused her to call the dead young man a thief and a robber. Those are just the impetuous expressions of the feminine mind."

Now nothing infuriates an intelligent woman to such an extent as to accuse her of having a feminine mind. I could see a quarrel brewing between Torgerson and Helen Haleck, and Jeffrey also realized that one was in the air. He stood up quickly and said that it was late and surely Dr. Julian must have arrived home by this time for dinner. So we took our departure, hurrying through the corridors and down the long stone stairs, leaving Helen and Torgerson to make their own private war and peace.

IX

In ten minutes Jeffrey and I had drawn up, in our respective cars, in front of Dr. Julian's long gray stone house on the hill. We arrived at an awkward moment. Dr. Julian and his wife were beginning dinner, the doctor having just come home. The maid who answered the bell was reluctant to let us in, and Dr. Julian, coming out into the hall with a napkin, was embarrassed at our inopportune appearance. Since they had servants it was impossible to spring guests upon them without warning. Guests required a long psychological approach and build-up. Dear me, dear me, Dr. Julian said, if we had only telephoned beforehand—how he wished it were possible for him to ask us to come in and take pot luck with him and his wife, but he was very much afraid, very much, that there were only *two* chops. He looked wretchedly uncomfortable and I hastened to say that we had eaten anyway and couldn't possibly eat anything more now. We would wait for him, if he didn't mind, in the garden.

We went out and sat in long chairs by the pool, and Jeffrey, being extremely hungry, was indignant. He considered Julian foolish and discourteous. Couldn't they have told the cook at least to boil a couple of eggs and make some coffee? It certainly wouldn't have been in accordance with our humbler traditions to send two starving guests out to wait in the garden while we gorged ourselves.

I was stretched out in a deck chair looking up at a blue and silver and saffron sky.

"They didn't know we were starving, my dear," I said, "I lied so convincingly. And people living in their style never do anything on the spur of the moment. It's impossible. He and Mrs. Julian are bound and shackled by their wealth. Besides, two chops are difficult to divide among four."

I closed my eyes and must have slept for a few minutes. When I came to myself Jeffrey was standing holding the yellow horse and Dr. and Mrs. Julian were there too, looking at it.

Dr. Julian said, "No, McNeill, I don't know a thing about it. Nellie," he shouted, "do you know anything about this fantastic beast?"

I got up from the chair, and Mrs. Julian said that I mustn't disturb myself, that she was so glad to see me taking a little rest, that this dear child, Dr. McNeill, was always doing too much, always pushing herself beyond her strength, she was afraid, and that Dr. McNeill really should take me in hand and put his foot down.

Dr. Julian shouted, "Nellie, do you know anything about this horse?"

She said in her flat monotone, "Well now, isn't that queer? It's appeared again. It just appeared by the pool one day and then vanished."

"Do you remember what day that was, Mrs. Julian?" Jeffrey asked.

"Oh, a week or two ago. Why do I connect it with poor Ames Auger, Jules?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," her husband answered. "Perhaps Ames brought it here—or someone else who came to bathe. You know, Joan, a good many of our neighbors drop in to swim, and sometimes they abandon their possessions on the lawn. We have at times quite a considerable lost and found department. I threaten to make our guests redeem their belongings for a sum which we will apply to Julian Relief. I am thinking of inaugurating a movement called, 'Bundles for Julian.'" He laughed and then said, "McNeill, shall we have a conference in my study on some matters relative to the unit?"

So Jeffrey and he went into the house and Mrs. Julian sat on a white iron chair near me and I lay in the deck chair again and had the greatest difficulty keeping awake while we discussed vitamins and allergies and the problems of her two little grandchildren now asleep upstairs.

"They have been here for quite a visit, haven't they?" I shouted. "They are such charming and delightful children, Mrs. Julian."

This launched her safely upon a dissertation about them, and her daughter's difficulties in getting maids in Greenwich, and Mrs. Julian's regrets that the children were going home soon. Her voice went on and on and my eyes got heavier and heavier until another voice brought me to myself.

Walter Dejon was saying, "There, I was right, you see. Mrs. Julian, I am infallibly right. I knew I heard Anne McNeill's voice over here. Cynthia and I were doing the dishes and I said, 'Cynthia my pet, there, if my ears do not deceive me, is Anne McNeill over in the Julians' garden.' And here she is."

"Whereupon he threw the dish towel in my face and fled like an arrow to the bow," Cynthia said. "Hi, Anne, are you as exhausted as you look?"

I said, "Hi, Cynthia, I'm afraid I haven't your iron indestructibility of make-up." I made no effort to rise, and lay where I was. I smiled up at them. It was late now and we were all blurred in the cool dusk.

Walter sat on the grass with his back against my chair, and Mrs. Julian fussed gently about the grass's being wet with dew and his not sitting on a cushion. Cynthia dropped down in another long chair. She was wearing a turquoise-colored dress tonight and she soon merged with the shadows and became a vague seductive form with a disturbing voice and the small light of a cigarette. She talked on and on about some quarrel at one of the war relief rooms where she works, about what this woman said and how that woman replied and then what she, Cynthia herself, had said, showing herself so much cleverer and more quick-tongued than the others.

While she talked a few stars came out overhead and evening smells of dampness and grass and roses became clearer and sweeter. Crickets made one intolerably drowsy and there was the slightest sound of water, ripples in the pool lapping against its marble sides.

Walter's hand came up out of the darkness and felt for my hand, reached and squeezed it, and I, not responding at all, took his and put it back again over the edge of the chair. Then after a few moments the hand came up again and I repeated the discouragement and hoped that Cynthia would not see what Walter was doing, but I thought she doubtless would.

I was relieved that Jeffrey and Dr. Julian came out of the house then, out of the bright rectangle of door from his study. They came and joined us and Jeffrey leaned over behind my chair and picked up the rubber horse.

"Walter—or Cynthia," he said, "does either of you know where this horse came from—or anything about it?" He lighted a match and in its flare the creature became a sudden clear grotesquerie in his arms. With the shadows playing over it one got the swift impression that it was trying to leap out of his grip and escape.

Walter said, "Good Lord, what an object! Opium Dream sired by Insanity out of Delirium Tremens. Why should you think I would know anything about that beast, McNeill?"

"I'm trying to find its owner. Do you know anything about it?"

"Not a thing. Never laid the eye on it before." Glibly.

But did he perhaps answer too glibly?

"Cynthia, can you help us out?" Jeffrey asked.

She yawned. The red cigarette end described a curved line in the darkness.

"Sorry, Jeffrey," she answered. "I never saw it before this minute. What's the mystery? The great surgeon sleuth rides again! On a yellow spotted rubber horse!" She laughed and Walter joined her, for the mental picture was funny.

I thought, "She wouldn't have used the term 'surgeon sleuth' if she knew how it infuriates him."

Dr. Julian said anxiously, "This is important. Can't any of you think back and remember who is the owner of this?"

I knew from the way he spoke that Jeffrey must have told him at least something of the significance of the creature, and something about my experiences of last night.

Nobody answered for a moment or two until Walter said, "Sorry, my mind's a blank about it."

Cynthia said, "The last two words are completely redundant, darling."

"See how my wife abuses me, McNeill? I'll bet Anne doesn't talk to you like that."

"No, she doesn't." Jeffrey was in no mood for verbal games like this. He said, "Anne, would you come into the house for a few minutes? There is something more I want to discuss with you and Dr. Julian."

So I got up and the Dejons said they had to be going, and Mrs. Julian said it was too damp now for her rheumatism. The Dejons left and the Julians and Jeffrey and I went into the house. Jeffrey was still carrying the horse.

We stood in the hall by the side door and Jeffrey said, loudly so that Mrs. Julian could hear and answer, "Would any of your maids be able to give us any information?"

"They might, of course," she answered. "You can go out into the kitchen, if you wish, and ask, Dr. McNeill."

They took us then into an immaculate green and white kitchen where four uniformed maids sat about a table drinking coffee. These women told us they had not the least idea about the horse's history or owner, although one of the maids said she remembered seeing it lying near the pool one day about two weeks ago.

"The children might know, though," she added. "I'll ask them in the morning, if you wish, Dr. McNeill."

We left the kitchen and went to the front of the house and Jeffrey said, "This is a very urgent matter, Dr. Julian. I should like to ask the children a few questions now."

There were protests from the grandparents and I thought he was making an impossible request and said so, firmly, but Jeffrey is not easily swayed. We stood at the foot of the stairs, looking at each other in an impasse, the Julians undoubtedly thinking of their daughter's indignation if they should allow the children to be routed out of bed and questioned at ten o'clock at night.

Jeffrey was politely insistent. He finally said, "Dr. Julian, if we do not find out the person who is the link between the unit and Zunyer the information about Auger's process may be in Zunyer's hands tomorrow and in the laboratories of Axis scientists next week."

Dr. Julian's large blue eyes became very anxious. He looked at his wife, raised his voice, and said, "It really is necessary to wake them, Nellie."

Reluctantly, with dignity, she led us upstairs to the children's room.

There were two small beds in a familiar setting of plush bears and bunnies. But these two boys were older than Michael. They must have been five and six, dark little ones sprawled limply in their striped blue pajamas. It seemed a great pity to wake them, nor was it easy. The younger, small Christopher, howled. The older, Blake, hid his face against his grandfather's side. Dr. Julian had sat down on the bed and put his arm about Blake. Jeffrey sat on the end of the bed, holding the horse.

He was very sweet and patient with the child, questioning him with simple sentences, but Blake continued to burrow against his grandfather and only now and then peeked out quickly at Jeffrey and shook his head.

Christopher was lying on his stomach, howling into a pillow and kicking his legs.

Mrs. Julian went off and returned with two lumps of sugar. This softening-up offering was efficacious, for Christopher was unable to howl and crunch at the same time, and Blake needed more space and air. Finally, resting in Dr. Julian's arm, he said that a man had brought the horse to the pool one day a long time ago, he thought it was last winter. He had blown the horse up and it had a leak and Blake had gone into the house and got some sticky tape out of the bathroom closet and the man had put it on the horse's face.

"Was it a young man?" Jeffrey asked.

"No, an old man."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"I don't know. I guess so. He was one of Grandpa's friends."

"Was he as old as your grandfather?" Jeffrey asked. "Or as old as I, or younger?"

"Aren't you as old as Grandpa?" Blake asked.

Dr. Julian said, "The young have no conception of relativity, McNeill."

Jeffrey smiled. He said, "How about it, Blake, was this man my age, or younger, or as old as Grandpa?"

"Oh, as old as Grandpa, or fifty years older, I guess maybe. He blew up the horse and put that sticky tape on it and then he had a swim and he held me and Christopher on the horse and then he went off and, Grandpa, how about those two turtles you said you'd give me and Christopher to take home next week?"

Dr. Julian said he would see about the turtles and

Jeffrey got up from the bed, realizing that the interview was over.

Mrs. Julian remained behind to settle the children and we went on downstairs.

"I'm afraid you didn't get anything of value," Dr. Julian said. He had come out to the sidewalk with us. "You can't place much reliance on the memory of children as young as ours."

Jeffrey said, "I'm afraid not. But thank you."

"You'll let me know what progress you make?"

"If any," Jeffrey answered. "Thanks. Good night."

Dr. Julian went back into his house and closed his door.

I was sorry that we had to drive home separately, each in his own car. There were things I wanted to talk over with Jeffrey and, besides, I had an unpleasant feeling that Zunyer and Pierre might be naturally interested in our activities and be waiting around somewhere not too far away, follow us and manage to get me away from Jeffrey and make themselves disagreeable again. But since Jeffrey was upset enough as it was I did not mention this.

We drove on home and once I was sure that a car was following me but after taking one or two turns close on my wheels it went on down Woolsey Avenue at a great pace, and in five minutes Jeffrey and I were safely in our own front hall.

I said, "Jeffrey, the only older men in the unit are Dr. Lajoie and Torgerson, and neither of them is as old as Dr. Julian, not nearly."

"I know," he said. "I'm going to telephone Bard and ask him to let me have copies of the photographs of all the members of the unit and then we'll see if the children can come a little nearer to it."

I said, "My dear, I don't think you should expect any more help from them than from a squirrel."

"Well, we've got to keep at it," he said, and went in to telephone while I went upstairs and undressed.

When he came up he was in a mood in which I have never before seen him, depressed and anxious beyond description and filled with the most heartbreaking remorse and self-condemnation. He kept tramping up and down the room in shorts and undershirt, saying that this was the most important obligation he had ever had and now he had fallen down on it. He had been put into the unit to give what help he could on the scientific side but especially to see that there was no leakage of information about activities—and here the most serious leakage had occurred right under his nose. Unless he could find the troublemaker the whole national program would be jeopardized. It was insupportable to feel such a burden of responsibility. He was a blind fool not to have been aware of what was going on in the unit, not to be able to see now, at once, who was the Judas. If he fell down on this the only decent thing left for him to do was to go off and blow out his brains.

I said, "Now you are talking like a fool," but he had frightened me, for my own father had committed suicide during the depression.

Jeffrey stood at the foot of my bed looking at me in desperation and I was wondering if a small dose of phenobarbital would soothe him when we heard the front doorbell ring.

X

I SAID, "I wouldn't get up if it were Churchill and Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek all standing on our doorstep."

Jeffrey said nothing but put on his brown silk bathrobe and went downstairs to see who was at the door.

I heard a girl's voice and his, and I dozed a moment or two and then opened my eyes and saw that he had brought Pauline upstairs and that she had been crying.

I said, "Hi, my dear, come in," and pushed myself up against the pillows.

Jeffrey got her a chair, fetched cigarettes, and sat down on the end of the chaise longue.

She said, "Mrs. McNeill, I know I shouldn't be disturbing you at this time of night, but I'm nearly frantic."

I said, "It's all right about disturbing us, Pauline. We're used to it so don't give it a thought. What are you frantic about?"

"About poor Ames and that note he left and everything. I had to type copies of it for the unit records and, you know, I don't think he ever wrote that note at all."

Jeffrey and I glanced at each other. He said, "What grounds have you for that statement, Pauline?"

"A lot of grounds. In the first place, if he were going to commit suicide, he would certainly have written a note to me, I should think. Wouldn't it seem natural to you to write to a girl you were going to marry and not just something to 'My dear Colleagues'?"

Jeffrey said, "I should think it would be natural, but still it is also natural that he should have written to the men with whom he was so closely associated."

"Closely associated in his work, yes, but not as friends. Not one of them liked him."

"He was a difficult man to know, Pauline. He gave the impression of being rather dour and disapproving," Jeffrey said. "He didn't respond to advances of friendship."

She said with indignation, "If he did seem so it was because he had a very hard time when he was young. His family hadn't a penny and he had to struggle so hard it made him a little bitter and gloomy. But I simply can't understand his going off and committing suicide that particular day because he had been in such a wonderful mood before he went home. And then that note! It just wasn't the sort of note he would ever have written."

Jeffrey sat on the end of the chaise longue, watching her. He had decided against a cigarette and got his pipe.

Pauline was in a pale maple chair, very modern and uncomfortable, and she looked uncomfortable and wretchedly unhappy although decorative with her silvery blond coloring against the silvery blue and gray of my room.

I was not taking much part in this conversation, being too sleepy and comfortable against my pillows.

Jeffrey said, "Just what do you mean about the note?"

"Well, a secretary notices things like that—I mean the way people write, everybody absolutely differently. I often think that the way a person writes is just like fingerprints——"

"You mean that an individual's style is as distinctive as fingerprints?"

"It seems to me so. They use certain words and not others and they put sentences together in the same way, and they make the same mistakes in spelling and punctuation. For instance Ames always spelled 'colleagues' wrong. He spelled it c-o-l-l-e-e-g-u-e-s. That was the first thing that seemed to me queer."

I said, "Perhaps he looked it up for that special letter."

"He hadn't any dictionary."

Jeffrey said, "What other things about the note seemed to you queer?" He occupied himself in lighting his pipe.

"Just the way it was written. It didn't sound like him at all. 'Some demon has shown me.' He never in the world thought about demons, much less dragged them into letters. That sounds like something Tom Morse might write."

"We won't bring anybody else into this now," Jeffrey told her, and then said, "You say he was in a particularly happy mood before he left the laboratory on the day he died?"

"Why, it was just marvelous! He came into the office and sat on the edge of my desk and I've never seen him so absolutely sure that everything was going to be all right. He was so gay about our getting married, and all full of the most marvelous plans of what he was going to do. He was absolutely sure he was succeeding with his idea about the process, and he had some plan he wouldn't tell me about for getting quantities of money, enough to travel all over Europe and go to Egypt, and he would do some work on rocket propulsion. He had some simply stupendous ideas about that and he started to tell me but they sounded so crazy that I told him I had to work, and anyway he said that his head had begun to ache and he felt a little dizzy so he went away, and then after a while Tom Morse told me Ames's head had got worse and he had gone home. But does that sound as if he would go back and immediately be in such a depressed mood that he would decide to commit suicide and swallow a lot of phenobarbital tablets?"

There was a slight pause before Jeffrey said, "No, I don't think it does. Did it seem to you that he was unusually garrulous?"

"Garrulous?"

"Talkative."

"Oh, absolutely. His words simply fell over each other."

"Did this elation of mood occur before lunch or after?"

"After lunch."

"I see."

There was a pause again. Pauline put out her cigarette stub and helped herself from a crystal box on a table near by.

I watched Jeffrey. From the withdrawn expression in his eyes I knew that this tale of Pauline's had some special meaning to him. He sucked on his pipe a moment or two and then said quietly, "Where did Auger have his lunch? Did he go out for it?"

"No, we all ate upstairs in the common room. We usually do, you know."

"Yes, I know," Jeffrey said. "I wasn't there for lunch that day. What did you have to eat?"

"Clam chowder that Dr. Julian's cook had made. He brought it over in a big thermos can. And we also had scrambled eggs and applesauce. As a matter of fact I cooked the eggs and heated up things and we all ate the same things so I know they were all right. It couldn't have been ptomaine, I should think, because then we would all have had it, wouldn't we, Dr. McNeill?"

He nodded his head. Then he looked at me and said, "There's a good-sized closet off that common room in the southwest tower. It's been fixed up as a small kitchen with gas flats and a sink and china and so on; a very neat place. Pauline, you cooked the lunch, you say—did you serve it too?"

"No, I didn't. The person who cooks doesn't serve or do the dishes or anything else. Everybody else pitches in and attends to those jobs."

"I see. Who did serve, do you remember?"

"No, I don't remember at all. Everybody was sort of milling around. I was tired so I flopped down in a chair and Ames brought his tray over to me."

"Ames brought his own tray. Did he make any comments about the food?"

"No. . . . Yes, perhaps he did. I think he said the chowder was definitely bitter, but I said it was all his imagination because it was really delicious, and that I wasn't going to marry him if he started in being fussy about his food. That is something we have all been very strictly brought up about in my family, so he stopped fussing and took it down and then I made him even eat up all the bits of clams and fish and potatoes and so on. You know what chowder is like."

"Yes, I know," Jeffrey said. I thought he seemed troubled and sorrowful.

Pauline sat up alertly. She said with apprehension, "Do you think there was anything the matter with anything he ate? Could he have got any poison—by mistake or anything?"

"Poison?" he asked.

"Something that wasn't phenobarbital?"

"No. His death was the result of paralysis of the respiratory center. It was doubtless caused by a lethal dose of a barbiturate."

"But could that have got into anything he ate at lunch by any chance?"

I thought she was rushing him too fast, that he had not yet arrived at this point and that he was reluctant to answer. He pushed the tobacco down into his pipe and said, "Did he go home alone?"

"Yes, he did, I know. I asked Tom Morse."

"I see. He was able to go home alone. His rooms are about a mile from the chemical laboratory, aren't they?"

"One room. Yes."

"A lethal dose of phenobarbital would have caused extreme drowsiness, dizziness, and ataxia. He would probably have gone into a state of shock."

She said, "You mean that if by mistake he had got phenobarbital into his food at lunchtime it would have acted too quickly and severely for him to get home?"

"Exactly."

"Then I suppose he just went back and did take it, as he said in his note?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it? Pauline, if I were you I should put any other consideration entirely out of my mind. I don't think it was a case of food poisoning. And as for thinking that Ames did not write the suicide note, because of the style, that's a vague sort of conclusion to draw. I should go home and take an aspirin and go to sleep. These are difficult times for everyone. Ames died in the war effort, as millions of his contemporaries are dying—I don't mean in the same way—but in the same service. I should go home and try not to think about this any more than you can help."

He got up and she did too then, and said she was so much relieved, that he had been such a wonderful help, and now she wouldn't worry so much. She hadn't liked to think some of the dreadful things she had thought. But everybody in the unit had been so frightfully antagonistic to poor Ames.

Jeffrey said kindly, "Perhaps you imagined some of the antagonism. If we love a person very much we are inclined to want to rush to war to protect him when perhaps there is no necessity for protection at all. And don't mention all these feelings of yours to anyone, will you?"

She said she wouldn't, smiled at him, thanked us, and apologized again for coming so late and disturbing us. Jeffrey went downstairs with her and I got up and looked at Michael, who was sleeping very sweetly with Flopsie, the old plush rabbit, in his bed in the next room.

Then I went back into my room and looked out onto the street where Zunyer's car had been parked last night. There was a car there tonight too and for a moment I was frightened. But music was coming from a radio in it and I heard a boy and girl laugh so there was nothing for us to fear there. The trees in the park were blowing more heavily than they had earlier in the evening and I thought a storm was coming, and I was unutterably thankful to be here, safely in my own house, not Zunyer's, and not unhappily dead and weighted down by a great stone in the waters of the Sound.

I got back into bed and Jeffrey came upstairs and sat on the chaise longue and smoked his pipe, saying nothing. I took the opportunity to fall asleep for a brief time.

When I woke he was telephoning, sitting on his own bed, saying into the receiver, "This is Dr. McNeill, Jackson. Sorry to get you up at this time of night but it's important. Can you tell me offhand if any phenobarbital disappeared from the stock room shortly over two weeks ago?" He listened and scowled a little. "Thanks—that's what I wanted to know. . . . I see. All right. . . . Thank you. Don't mention this, please. Good night." He put up the receiver and sat looking at me gloomily.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I'm afraid Auger was murdered," he said.

I realized that that fear had been in the back of my mind. I said, "How was it done, Jeffrey?"

"I may be jumping at conclusions, but from Pauline's description of Ames's elevation of mood, his elation and enhanced speech activity, I should say that he had had a dose of benzedrine with his lunch."

"Why benzedrine? He didn't die of an overdose of that, did he?"

"No. His death was diagnosed properly. That was all right as far as the diagnosis went. What it looks like to me is that someone put a lethal amount of phenobarbital in his bowl of chowder and added benzedrine, which would correct the ataxia and drowsiness. That is a combination used for the control of epilepsy. The benzedrine would delay the action of the phenobarbital, then wear off and the barbiturate would begin to act."

I said, "Jeffrey, who was that you were telephoning to?"

"Jackson. He keeps the stock room at the laboratory. He hadn't any record of any disappearance of phenobarbital. He keeps that locked up. Benzedrine is around a laboratory naturally. The barbiturates are odorless white crystalline powders, soluble in hot water and alcohol. The taste is slightly bitter, but not very. It's a popular way of committing suicide at present. But certainly this looks like murder, not suicide."

I asked, "What was the motive, do you think?"

"Jealousy, I imagine. The person who did it wanted to get those pages in Auger's notebook. He was jealous because he thought Auger stood a good chance of being the one to solve the process and give the atomic bomb to the government."

"Jealousy is a child of the devil," I said, and then remembered who had made that remark before. "Who did it, Jeffrey?" I asked, but I always do ask that question too soon in our investigations.

He replied, with some impatience, that we were a long way from that goal still.

I said, "We may be on the wrong track, Jeffrey. He may not have been killed because of the pages in the notebook but for some other personal matter."

"I suppose that is a possibility," he admitted.

"Why didn't you follow up what Pauline said about everyone in the unit's being so antagonistic to Ames?"

"She was excited enough as it was. Excitement doesn't make for a clear, unbiased analysis of personal relationships. I'll get someone else's opinion on the subject of Auger's unpopularity."

"Whose?"

"Dr. Julian's, or perhaps Lajoie's, or Helen Haleck's."

"Helen is too prejudiced herself, because of Hans Torgerson. And I always feel that Dr. Julian isn't really aware of human emotions—only brains. I think Lajoie is wise and discerning."

"We'll ask Lajoie about it then. Shall we——"

"No, we will *not* go up there tonight," I interrupted his thought. "That would not be handling this with finesse. If we go storming around dragging everybody up from their sleep they will all know that something is seriously wrong with the unit, and they'll be thrown into the most impenetrable taciturnity of panic and we won't be able to pry a word out of them. The thing for you to do, my dear, is to relax and go to bed and to sleep."

Some ten minutes later, when it was dark and the windows were wide open and I heard rain beginning to fall through the leaves, I said, "Jeffrey, are you asleep?"

"Asleep—with all I have on my mind!"

"Here's another pleasant thought for it. Do you think Zunyer could have had anything to do with the murder?"

"By remote control, perhaps; in fact very possibly."

Outside the rain came down more heavily and in the bed next mine I heard poor Jeffrey muttering, "No light on the subject and I swear I don't know what to do next."

XI

THE NEXT MORNING I went down to the chemical laboratories with Jeffrey. We went up the wide stone stairs to the third floor, turned to the right, and came to the heavily locked doors that shut off Dr. Julian's rooms from those of the rest of the building.

All the members of the unit were there at work although Dr. Lajoie and Talbert, having been on duty during the night, should have gone home to rest.

Everyone greeted me cordially and seemed pleased to have me with them, which was gratifying. I thought again how much I liked them all and respected them.

Dr. Julian was particularly kind and anxious to make me feel at home. He took me around the various rooms with the pride of a man showing off a beloved house.

Perhaps a chemist or a physicist would have been able to tell at a glance just what project was under way and how far it had progressed but I could have been questioned for nights on end by Zunyer and still have been able to tell him nothing. What I saw was the setting, the background for the great play, nothing more.

The laboratories at the medical school give one an impression of black and gray and aluminum, but the chemical laboratories create an effect of yellow and tan and brown: yellow brick walls, yellowish-tan woodwork, brownish-stained sinks.

There are always sinks around the sides of laboratories, and long lines of benches, waist-high, with lockers and drawers built in solidly beneath them; and in the drawers there always seem to be odds and ends of corks and wires and filter papers and bits of glass and discarded articles of scientific junk. Here in these rooms were systems of pipes overhead for the sprinkler system, and green-shaded lights pendant at frequent intervals. There were glass skylights in the roof, but these were painted over now for the blackout, and also possibly to prevent anyone from climbing onto the roof and looking down at what was going on below. Because of the blacked-over windows all work was done by artificial light.

I looked around and saw many glass-fronted cases containing chemical balances, or scales, and there were many water tanks for constant-temperature baths. The sounds in the laboratory were those of water dripping, of people moving quietly about handling glass and metal deftly.

The varied glassware is to me the most interesting feature of laboratory furnishing. Here were flasks and carboys, racks of long vertical glass tubes like some strange musical instruments; bottles of chemical reagents and acids and dyestuffs, lovely red and lavender liquids, and, above all, that which had importance even to me: great flasks of yellow crystals which were the sacred uranium.

I was assigned a small room equipped with sinks and lockers around the walls, a desk, a chair, a stool, and a huge machine composed of a multitude of complex parts and having a vast switchboard attached to it. This was not for my use or entertainment but was there simply because it had established residence, as it were, at some long-past date. A man had worked on it for two years and spent thousands of dollars on its construction and then gone on to some other university. Now even the purpose of this apparatus was forgotten. To sit there accompanied by its extravagant uselessness gave one a bleak feeling of the unimportance of effort. It was a ponderous symbol of defeat.

Since my function in the unit was a little vague, work had had to be made for me. "Now, my dear Joan," Dr. Julian said to me, "I think the best thing for you to do is to start a bibliography. Don't you think so, McNeill? A good bibliography is always of the greatest value, and nothing is more fascinating to work on. You won't be able to tear yourself away from it. We'll start you off on a bibliography of uranium isotopes."

He detached Helen Haleck from her own work to initiate me, and she seemed slightly remote and lacking in enthusiasm at the interruption. However, she took me to the chemical library, showed me a pile of reprints in Dr. Julian's office, got a stack of three-by-five cards for files, showed me the form in which to make them out, and then left me, saying that she would see me at lunch in the common room at twelve.

Knowing what I did about a certain lunch in the common room, I was not too pleased at the thought.

The thing to do now seemed to be to get to work on the bibliography. I went back to the library, where several youths were quietly studying. Here I looked up Chemical Abstracts, large brown volumes, and in one found "Uranium" and under this a reference to isotopes. I saw that there were articles on the subject in several German journals, so I found these on the shelves and at the end of these articles were further bibliographies and further references. This undertaking was like expanding circles in the water, and the shores of completion were so distant as to be out of sight. Finally, having taken pages of names and notes, I went back to my office and sat at the desk, making out cards in consistent form.

Once or twice Jeffrey looked in to see how I was coming, and I said I seemed to have caught on to the method of the bibliography but I couldn't see how, shut off in here with the behemoth of a machine, I was to be of much help in finding out Zunyer's connecting link with the unit.

He sat on the stool and said one never could tell, and anyway he felt better at having me available and aware of what was going on.

Then Dr. Julian came in and Jeffrey gave him the stool and himself leaned against a sink board.

Dr. Julian said he had come in to find out how I was getting along and to say how glad he was to have me with them, but he had realized that there were certain matters he had neglected to mention to me and perhaps Jeffrey had not thought of them; in the first place he wanted me to know a little about the unit's work.

He therefore went into an explanation. He said it was known that U-235 could be separated from U-238; that this had been done in minute quantities by at least two methods. But these methods, if used on a scale large enough to produce within the next four years even one atomic bomb, would require apparatus and labor fantastic in scope and cost. The expense to the government would run into billions of dollars. But the authorities hoped that there might be some simpler and relatively less costly method. "And our contract," Dr. Julian said, "calls for a search for such a method, and that search we are engaged upon now, so far, unfortunately, not successfully.

"And now, my dear Joan, there are some customs and rules of the unit that everyone working in it must observe. We never mention uranium by name. We always refer to it as X in case we may be overheard by some enemy agent. Also, of course, we never mention atomic energy, nor is anything that takes place here ever discussed outside the walls. I shall have to ask you not to throw away any scrap of paper. Keep every piece, even to the smallest bit that you use during the day, and check it in at my desk before you go home at night. I see that Pauline locks all paper and notebooks into the safe in the evening and that they are taken out as needed in the morning. Talbert and Lajoie are at present working here at night. There are always at least two on duty."

I said, "Dr. Julian, do you mean that you keep every single bit of scratch paper?"

"Oh yes," he answered. "Washington is afraid that some worker might absent-mindedly jot down a vital note or equation, that this would be thrown out with the laboratory trash and found by some foreign agent. And you will notice that we have no loose-leaf notebooks; they are all large and heavy and firmly bound. Poor Ames Auger's pages were cut out. . . . McNeill, I am convinced that those must have been burned. I don't really hold with your hypothesis that they have been turned over, or are to be turned over, to the enemy. I cannot believe that we have anyone in our unit who would do a thing like that."

Jeffrey said, "I hope you are right, Doctor. I imagine you are. But we don't want to take anything for granted."

"No, no, certainly not," the doctor said. "Much better to err on the side of overcaution. Very well then, Joan." He got up and I realized that it was useless to expect he would ever accept me as Anne. "We'll see you at lunchtime upstairs in the common room."

Jeffrey smiled at me and the two went out and left me to return to the bibliography.

They had no sooner closed the door than they opened it again and Dr. Julian said, "Oh, another thing, Joan. These X salts that we work with—we dry and evaporate them in large basins, you know—are extremely poisonous. Always be most careful to wash your hands before eating and be careful, also, about breathing laboratory dust. And remember, in your work on the bibliography, the French journals are notoriously difficult because you can't trust any of the references and the German ones are full of pitfalls. . . . Until lunchtime, then. My wife's cook has contributed some very excellent and delicious chicken okra soup."

I was even less pleased than before at the thought of sharing that lunch. It seemed to me that Jeffrey and I were in a most unenviable position. Certainly if some member of the unit was in touch with Zunyer he would know that the McNeills were aware of the danger to the project, and he would take swift and decisive steps to get us out of the way. I sat at my desk with the filing cards before me and wondered why we were being allowed to continue existence at all. But perhaps no satisfactory method of eliminating us had been devised as yet. I ardently hoped that our adversary was lacking in ingenuity; but there are so many, many ways to kill.

The common room was in the southwest tower of the building. It was paneled in pine boards which had myriads of natural knots. It was furnished with Windsor chairs, a few more comfortable, overstuffed ones, and several tables. Here the windows were not blacked out but were provided with heavy, black-lined curtains in attractive mulberry-colored chintz. I went to one of the windows and looked out. The streets were some four stories below, and one of the university colleges was opposite. It was raining hard. Small, foreshortened people scurried along with umbrellas which were blown in the wind. The window I was looking out of was in the side of the tower near the roof of the building. There was a distance of about ten feet from this window across to the battlements I have mentioned before. A wide gutter was formed between the battlements and the slanting mansard roof. Someone had put a potted ageratum out of one of the dormer windows onto the gutter. It was a forlorn small plant with all the appearance of neglect and continual lack of water. I was glad it was having a chance to take in a good drink now.

Jeffrey was standing beside me. He said in a low tone, reassuringly, "It's all right, I'm sure, Anne. Don't worry." I think he knew that I was worrying a little about the chicken okra soup. He went off to the door that led into the kitchenette. Most of the people in the unit were milling about there now.

Dr. Lajoie came up to me and said that he always found the roofs of buildings fascinating. He would never forget a little scene like a vignette, once in Paris. He had been walking along a side street near the Place des Etats Unis and he had looked far up and seen a pretty, fairhaired girl in blue looking out of a rounded ornamental dormer window that framed her like a locket. He would have liked to take it down and keep it in a red velvet case.

"I always envy Sam Talbert and the other graduate students who have their rooms up on the top floor of this building," he said.

"They are all graduate students' rooms?" I asked.

"Yes, chiefly, although I believe some are given over to old university dependents, and some are vacant. I can't imagine why."

Walter Dejon came up at this point with a cup of soup on a tray for me, and everyone else came out of the kitchen with their trays and soup and crackers. We moved chairs and sat in a group, and Walter was not pleased because, I knew, he had wanted to get me off apart by himself and tell me his latest troubles, and how Cynthia simply was incapable of understanding his particular type of mind.

Then, unexpectedly, we found ourselves in the midst of a scene, at a moment when ascending lines of emotion converged at a high point of climax.

Tom Morse was responsible. He had been talking with Helen Haleck, who sat next to him, and we heard the last words of one sentence and were arrested in our own conversations, as we had been at the Dejons' party. His voice and his fervent conviction forced one to listen. Seeing that he had our attention, he merged us, from individuals, into a congregation. ". . . intense agony of mind and spirit for us all," he had been saying, and he went on, "We are laborin' for the adversary, the tempter, seeking to alter the ordained pattern, the order of the universe. Blind servants of Satan, we are seeking to rob from the arsenal of the Lord a weapon which will destroy nations and people and lay civilization in a waste of ruin and wolves and desolation. The awful hand of the Lord has already fallen upon one of us in chastisement, and it will strike again and again and yet again in vengeance unless we turn from this extreme depravity, wash our robes in contrition, and make them white with the blood of the Lamb."

"What do you want us to do? Chuck up the whole project entirely?" Sam Talbert asked.

Dr. Julian said with heat, "We have been given an interesting and important problem by the government. It is a problem which has claimed the attention of our scientific predecessors for hundreds of years. I consider it a high privilege to be given such an opportunity to work toward atomic power. Morse, you speak of the destruction of civilization, but I see the development of such power rather as a stupendous benefit to mankind. It will stop all wars, it will supplant all known sources of power. In comparison with this the introduction of oil was as nothing! I look beyond destruction, Morse, to construction——"

"Moreover," Dr. Lajoie put in, "we are engaged upon this as a patriotic obligation. As Dr. Julian has said, we have been given this project by the government——"

"But won't it mean the most ghastly loss of life?" Pauline interrupted. "I don't understand it very well, but I've heard that it will wipe out whole cities of Japanese and Germans. Is it right? I can't feel that it is right to do it."

"She's got something there," Walter Dejon said.

"Sometimes when I think about it I'd be willing to do almost anything to chuck the whole damn thing over. If we were so indignant at the beginning of the war at the Germans shelling French refugees on the roads, how about what we are planning to do now to hundreds of thousands of civilians! I swear I sometimes think Tom Morse is right and the Devil is behind it."

"You are seeing the white light of truth!" Tom Morse cried. "Don't turn away!"

Hans Torgerson said slowly, "There is something indeed in what Tom Morse and Dejon and the young Pauline have said."

I thought, "Are they going to bolt from the whole thing? This is extraordinary."

"The way I look at it," Sam Talbert said, "is that the whole damn enterprise ought to be purged of all the elements of nationalism. We ought to keep on to a finish and then everybody who's been working on it get together in a solid front and insist on turning the findings over to an international commission. That's the ideal, but somehow I don't see the majority of our politicians down in Washington agreeing to anything as sane as that is. . . . God, their shortsightedness makes my guts churn——"

Lajoie was angry and offended at Talbert's concluding phrase. He said, "You forget that we are working as much under governmental orders as any private in the Army. We are as definitely under military obligation and rule as if we were in uniform in one of the services." He sat forward in his chair, his dark face animated, handsome with angry sincerity. "Does the gunner in a bomber say to his superior, 'No, this bomb which I am ordered to drop will cause too much destruction. I have decided not to obey orders to drop it'?"

"It would be a damn sight better for the world if the gunners should all say that," Sam Talbert said.

Something caught my attention and caused me to look over at the wall at a place about twelve feet to the right of the window from which I had looked out. I thought I saw a slight trickle of sawdust drop from one of the knots in the pine paneling and fall about a yard to the floor.

But Lajoie was saying with great indignation, "Dr. Julian, I consider these opinions subversive and dangerous and that their expressions should be curbed at once."

"How about freedom of speech?" Talbert fairly shouted. "My God, do we have to be muzzled like Nazis?"

"I thought you were objecting to our developing means to fight the Nazis," Lajoie said. "We all know that unless we give to this work all the intelligence and energy and devotion of which we are possessed the Germans will devise this bomb before we do. We know that they are working on it and are almost upon our heels. It is a race to the death and anyone who weakly spares himself, who hampers the unit's efforts by psychological sabotage, like Talbert's remarks here—that one is no better than a traitor—"

"Traitor!" Sam Talbert cried angrily. "That's a handful of mud I'm not going to have anyone throwing at me, Lajoie."

I was watching that knot in the wall. Could I be mistaken or was sawdust drifting down from it?

Dr. Julian was saying in agitation, "Now, everybody, please, please, this gets us nowhere, nowhere. There is some salad, I believe, Helen? Isn't there salad to follow our soup course?"

I was sorry for Dr. Julian, and worried about him. He did not like this friction among his people. His face was red, and veins stood out in his temples in a way that is not good for an elderly man, but I doubted if his suggestion of salad could bring calm now.

Tom Morse stood up and said, almost in exaltation, "The truth is being made manifest unto you. I call upon each one of you to shake off the chains of Satan, to go forth and publish in the streets to all people the knowledge of this evil which is being perpetrated upon mankind!"

This frightened them. Dr. Julian declared in an alarmed voice, "Morse, if I ever hear another such suggestion from you I shall turn you over to the F.B.I."

Lajoie said, "Don't brand the unit with that disgrace—handle it ourselves!"

There was a general confusion of everyone starting to comment until Helen Haleck spoke and the others listened because she was one to whom people do listen. She said, "I think too much has been said just now about traitors among us. None of us is a John Hutardo's cat. I myself don't go in for exalted ideological allegiances. More young men have died from the devotion to noble slogans than from all the contagious diseases added together. When people talk about dying for democracy and giving up your life for your country I shift promptly into reverse. But Tom Morse isn't going to be a damn fool and go shouting out our secrets from the housetops. We all know that we have an important and thrilling problem here and we want to carry it on to completion. Somebody is going to find out about atomic power soon and we might as well be the ones. . . . Somebody had better get Tom a cup of tea. He looks done in."

He did look done in. His face was as white as my paper napkin.

But that knot in the wall and the sawdust! I thought, "Why, that is serious." I said, "Jeffrey, just a minute, please," and got up and went to the front of the room.

He followed me and I said beneath my breath, "Jeffrey, what about this knot in the panel?"

There was a little heap of sawdust on the floor under it.

He said, "But that would be on the sheer side of the tower, wouldn't it?" He leaned over and put his finger out to touch the knot, which was not a knot at all. His finger went into a hole. He said, "There's a metal tube in here," then moved as quickly as he could to the window, took a pistol from his pocket, and broke a pane of glass.

I was beside him and I saw the man in the rain outside in the roof gutter, beyond the battlements, getting up from where he had been kneeling listening.

"Stop right there!" Jeffrey shouted.

The man didn't stop. He turned and scrambled to escape, to reach the dormer windows. He tripped over the ageratum plant and Jeffrey shot him just as he plunged forward into one of the windows, and sprawled there, half in and half out of the window, as Jeffrey turned to face the consternation of the room.

XII

JEFFREY SAID, "Is there any way to get from this room over to the top floor of the other part of the building?"

"Only by going downstairs and to the front and up again," Dr. Julian said. "What has happened, McNeill?"

"Talbert, come and show me how to get there," Jeffrey ordered. Without any explanation he ran out of the door with Talbert following him.

I looked out of the window and saw the man's legs twitch and kick a little, and I thought how ghastly it was not to be able to get to him quickly and see how badly he was hurt.

Everyone in the room was crowding about me, trying to look out and asking excited questions.

I hurried toward the door, saying, "There was a man in the gutter, listening. He tried to get away when Jeffrey called to him to stop." Then I ran down the stairs and along the corridor from which Dr. Julian's laboratories open.

Jeffrey and Talbert had been stopped a moment, unlocking the large doors that close us off from the rest of the building. These snapped with a spring lock behind us and we ran as fast as we could around the main part of that floor, up the narrow stairs, and along the hallway where I had seen Helen Haleck the day before.

We passed again the bedrooms of graduate students and, looking into four of these rooms, we saw no horrifying sight sprawled in a window. But in the fifth it was there, drooping down over the window sill and the radiator, hands and arms limply hanging and blood in a great puddle on the floor and all over the man's brown suit and his yellow shirt and the tan necktie, and what remained of his dark hair.

One look was enough for me. I went and sat down on the bed and took a magazine from the table while Jeffrey and Talbert moved the object to the floor.

When I felt a little less sick I said, "Jeffrey, that was Pierre."

"Pierre?" Jeffrey's voice was sharp with strain.

"Zunyer's man. The one who was going to tie a weight on me and drop me into the Sound."

"Then he got just what was coming to him." There was great relief in his tone.

For me too the gripping chill of regret that Jeffrey had done this was alleviated because this had been so evil and dangerous a man.

"Who was he?" Jeffrey asked. "What was his last name, Anne?"

"I haven't the least idea. Zunyer called him Pierre. He spoke with a lower New York or Brooklyn street accent."

"We may find something in his pockets," Jeffrey said.

"These boys usually strip themselves pretty carefully before going out on dangerous assignments," Talbert said.

Although I didn't turn my head I gathered then that they were examining the pockets, and while this was going on someone said:

"My God, what's going on in my room?"

A tall youth who was apparently the rightful inhabiter of the room stood in the doorway and turned a pale green color. Hurrying footsteps behind him warned of several approaching people, and in a moment the other members of Dr. Julian's unit were there standing about the door, looking in, shocked into silence.

Then the questions began.

Jeffrey said, "I know nothing at all as yet. This man was listening to the conversation of the unit and he tried to escape when I ordered him to stop. So I shot him. Dr. Julian, would you be kind enough to telephone for Bard of the F.B.I.? And would the rest of you mind leaving me here with Mrs. McNeill? We'll discuss this further downstairs after I have consulted with Mr. Bard."

By that time a lot of students and other people, getting wind of excitement, had come upstairs and were crowding around, asking horrified, hushed questions, trying to look over one another's shoulders. And the boy whose room it was had quite caved in and been taken away to the small first-aid dispensary downstairs. I think it was Helen Haleck or Lajoie who finally managed to lead everybody off.

Jeffrey followed them to wash his hands and I was left alone for a few unpleasant minutes but he soon returned and closed the door.

I had taken a sheet off the bed and put it over the body of Pierre.

Jeffrey stood with his back against the door, holding onto the knob as if he were afraid that if he let go he would fall. He said, "You know, Anne, it takes it out of you in an extraordinary way to do a thing like this.

I know that the man was the worst type of heel, but to have killed him in this way was so damn uncivilized. And then I didn't want to kill him. I wanted to wing him and be able to get some information out of him. Now we're no nearer your Zunyer than we were before." He came over, sat down on the bed beside me, and squeezed his hands together as if to keep from shivering.

He said, "If I could only see just how Auger and Zunyer were linked!"

"Perhaps Auger discovered that some member of the unit was willing to sell out to Zunyer and threatened to tell the authorities and Zunyer murdered him—or Pierre murdered him—as the only way to keep him quiet. That seems probable. And Pierre certainly seemed to know his way around the building here."

"Someone must have shown him the way around."

"Talbert has a room on this floor," I said reluctantly.

"Talbert seems to me a pretty straight boy. . . . Didn't you say you saw Helen Haleck up here yesterday?"

"Yes, but Helen seems to me even straighter than Sam. They all seem straight. I like them all, very much, every one of them. What are you doing, Jeffrey?"

He was climbing up onto the radiator and the high window sill, climbing out.

"I'm going to investigate and see if I can find anything out here."

He let himself down, and I went around the body of Pierre and looked out of the window. It had stopped raining now and I thought the sun would come out soon. Jeffrey made his way along the gutter with the battlements at his right. The higher wall of the tower rose in front of him. When he came to that he knelt in the gutter and examined something, then he turned, beckoned to me, and indicated also that I should be quiet. So, not liking this at all, for I am afraid of heights, I climbed gingerly out and went to him. We were crowded together between the sloping slate mansard roof on our left and the battlements at our right. Near the place where the tower wall joined the mansard roof a slate had been removed and a hole bored. A metal tube smaller in diameter than a lead pencil protruded from the hole and from the end of the metal tube dangled a short rubber one.

Jeffrey whispered, "A hole must have been bored through that knot in the common-room paneling. It would have required a good deal of clever figuring to work out the distances and so on. See if you can hear anything."

I put the end of the rubber tube in my ear and listened and I heard Hans Torgerson's voice saying, as if he were frightened, "But what will they think if they find out, Helen?"

And Helen Haleck's answering, "Nobody saw you, Hans."

Then there were footsteps across a floor and the sound of a door closing.

I said, "Jeffrey, let's get back onto firm ground, please. I've just heard two of the most distressing sentences I have almost ever heard in my life."

I must have shown a reaction of shock, for Jeffrey hurried me back with great care along the gutter and into the room. He made me lie down on the bed and said that I had had more than I could take and he would get me home as soon as Bard came and what I needed was a good night's sleep. And now, if I could, would I please tell him what I had heard through Pierre's tube.

I told him, and he was not as impressed as I had been.

He said that it was foolish to jump at conclusions, that Hans's remark might not have the slightest connection with this case, that isolated sentences like that, without any text around them, were always apt to be misinterpreted. We would ask what they had meant and find some logical and reasonable explanation.

I was glad that he seemed as reluctant as I to believe ill of those two.

But then I was reluctant to believe ill of any of this group.

Bard came soon after that and I told him what I knew about Pierre, which was certainly very little, and then I said that I would go on downstairs.

Someone knocked at the door and there was the tall boy who belonged in the room saying that he would very much like to get out some books and a notebook if we didn't mind. He still looked greenish and subdued.

Bard said, "Were you in your room last night?"

"I wasn't, sir," he answered. "I've been home for about seven weeks with whooping cough. I never had it when I was a kid and I just got back this morning. This was sure some welcome back."

"Was your room vacant all that time?" Jeffrey asked.

"As far as I know, sir."

"Have you ever seen this man before?" Bard turned the sheet back from the figure on the floor.

The poor boy turned greener than ever, said no, indeed, he never had laid eyes on him, and fled without his books.

I also left and went downstairs.

Everybody seemed to be back at his work so I returned to my bibliography. In about forty minutes Jeffrey came in and said that Bard wanted to see everyone in the large laboratory.

We all gathered there and sat on high stools or leaned against the benches and Bard stood by one of the sinks and looked very much out of place in this scientific background. His appearance of being a gloomy little businessman was more than ever accentuated.

He said, "Now I've got to tell you people that a very serious thing has happened. Dr. McNeill shot a man who was listening in on the conversation of the unit. I don't mean it was serious he was shot, because he certainly got what was coming to him. But the serious angle of this situation is that he knew enough about the geography of this building, and about the habits of this group, to be up there on the roof listening."

Dr. Julian said, "But—er—Mr. Bard, a great many people know the geography of this building. Thousands of students have worked here at one time or another; and hundreds, if not thousands, of employees."

"That's all right, Dr. Julian," Bard answered. "That's undoubtedly true, but we can't let it go at that. . . . Who was on duty here last night?"

Lajoie answered, "I was here, Mr. Bard."

And Talbert added, "I was too. What of it?"

"Did either of you go up to the common room?" Bard asked.

The two men explained that they had not, that they had been busy in the laboratory, had had their midnight sandwiches here and made coffee over a Bunsen burner in one of the smaller rooms across the hall.

"Did any stranger get in and go upstairs?" Bard asked.

"It wouldn't have been possible," Lajoie replied. "The outer door was carefully locked all the time."

"Perhaps somebody slipped in during the day and hid in one of the lockers or somewhere," Pauline suggested, and looked as frightened as a child.

Hans Torgerson said, "But why, may I ask, is it that you are of the opinion that anyone came into these rooms? The man was outside on the roof, listening, was he not?"

"He was," Bard said, "but have you thought of this angle of it?" He paused, knowing that to wait a moment before a sentence gives it emphasis and importance. "Somebody bored a hole through that knot in the paneling from *inside* the common room. I don't believe it could ever have been struck dead center as it was from outside on the roof."

That statement evoked a reaction, a murmur of comments.

"Any unauthorized strangers been wandering around here in the last six or seven weeks?" Bard asked.

Several members of the unit spoke, assuring him that no unauthorized strangers were ever allowed to step foot over the threshold. Occasionally, Dr. Julian said, men higher up in the project came from New York or Washington to see what progress was being made, but they were not strangers and they always came with the most unquestionable authority.

I thought, "If they only realized the implications they wouldn't all be so anxious to refute the possibility of some outsider's getting in."

Talbert said, "Mrs. Julian and Cynthia Dejon have taken rolls and soup and stuff up to the common room occasionally. They're not actually members of the unit."

This ungracious suggestion met with indignant protests.

Helen Haleck said, "Well, I suppose it is conceivable that this man who was shot might have found our doors unlocked at some time, or even had a duplicate key or a passkey. He might have slipped in and hidden until late at night when there are not many people around. Perhaps he did just that and went up to the common room to bore the hole."

Jeffrey said, "He couldn't have had a passkey or a duplicate. These are specially made locks."

"Now what I shall have to ask you all to do," Bard said, "is to come upstairs, one by one, and see if any of you can identify this man. We've got to find out his name, or the unit will have to close up entirely. Someone knows a lot too much about what goes on here."

"You're not suggesting that there is a leakage through any one of us, are you, Mr. Bard?" Lajoie asked in indignation.

"I'm not suggesting anything, Dr. Lajoie," Bard answered, "excepting that we've got to find out about this dead man upstairs. We've got to get his name and the people he is working for and who he is working through. This one is no ordinary Peeping Tom. . . . Dr. Julian, would you be good enough to come up with Dr. McNeill and myself, first?"

There seemed to be about us not the usual psychological atmosphere of a laboratory, which is so pleasantly friendly but impersonal, so absorbed in the immediate, stimulating problems of science. I felt now a thickness of disapproval mixed with anxiety.

I slipped out and went back to my own room and the bibliography.

XIII

IF I DIDN'T MIND, Jeffrey said when we left the chemical building that afternoon, we would go around to have cocktails with Lajoie before dinner.

"I don't mind at all, if we can go home and see Michael for a few minutes first. Did Dr. Lajoie ask us?"

"I said I had something I wanted to discuss with him, and he invited us formally then. . . . Anne, nobody in the unit recognized Pierre. They all swore they had never laid eyes on him before and I don't think they were lying. Pauline nearly keeled over, poor girl."

We drove on and I found myself thinking about Zunyer, about where he and his handsome wife and Konrad had gone, and what Zunyer would be thinking tonight when Pierre didn't turn up and didn't turn up and Zunyer waited and waited for him to bring back the good red wine that he had doubtless promised. I supposed that Mr. Bard would scarcely put a notice of Pierre's death in the *Times* or the *Tribune*, and perhaps Zunyer would never know what had happened to his man. But no, the link in the unit would communicate with him and tell him. Perhaps that enlightening conversation was taking place over the telephone even now.

There was something else that was troubling me and had been ever since the heated conversation of the unit at lunchtime. It was something someone had said.

"What was John Hutardo's cat?" I asked Jeffrey.

"I don't know. Helen Haleck used that expression, didn't she?"

"Yes—and, Jeffrey, Konrad said that he supposed he was being John Hutardo's cat."

"Konrad?"

"Zunyer's small boy."

"Oh."

We made no further comment in regard to that.

By half past five we were parking in front of Dr. Lajoie's white colonial house, and his colored servant was leading us through the hall into the living room.

Here there were fine early American pieces, and overstuffed chairs for comfort, white bookcases with beautiful leather-bound books, a small grand piano, Dürer, and only Dürer, on the walls. There were Steuben glass bowls here and there, holding bell-shaped flowers: petunias, nasturtiums, and salpiglossis. Lajoie was a man, I thought, who made an art of his small consistencies.

In a moment or two he came downstairs and greeted us with a warming cordiality. The old colored houseman brought us old-fashioneds and most excellent hors d'oeuvres. We sat looking out onto the garden, where birds bathed in a pool and fluttered about the feet of a naked bronze nymph.

If I had been managing this interview alone I should have led into it by preparatory amenities, but Jeffrey wasted no time.

He said, "Dr. Lajoie, it is necessary for me to have further information about the members of the unit. I didn't want to bother Dr. Julian. He looked tired, I thought, and distressed when he went home. I should like to take the various people up one by one and have you tell me what you can about them, if you will."

Dr. Lajoie said, "I'm not much of a man for gossip, McNeill, but I suppose you are trying to sift out the person who bored that knothole."

"Yes, that's it," Jeffrey replied. "He's got to be found."

"I quite realize that," Lajoie agreed. "It's treason, of course, but I cannot bring myself to a belief that it is flourishing right in our midst. They are all such a decent lot of people, McNeill, and so brilliant. I'm inclined to think, as Dr. Haleck suggested, that someone did slip in from outside."

"That may be," Jeffrey agreed, "but we must exhaust the possibilities of the unit first. We have to begin somewhere. What is your opinion of Hans Torgerson?"

"I like him. He is sincere and able and quiet. He has suffered deeply. I know no ill of him at all."

"Has he had a happy relationship with the others?"

"I should say yes, on the whole, particularly with Dr. Haleck." Lajoie smiled and I said that we knew about that and were extremely pleased.

"He was not, however, very friendly with poor Ames Auger," Dr. Lajoie went on, "because, I believe, he felt that Auger had taken and was developing an original idea of his own. That made both Torgerson and Helen Haleck rather bitter against Auger, I'm afraid."

I said, "Poor Ames Auger wasn't very popular among any of his colleagues, was he?"

"I'm afraid not. Talbert of course disliked him intensely as he had every reason to, poor lad, since Ames appropriated Pauline. Auger was an atheist and one of these aggressive ones. He used to goad Tom Morse about religion until I wondered how Tom could endure it without complete loss of self-control. Auger was a very trying and irritating person. I myself found him so. He was, I thought, an opportunist, completely focused upon himself and the acquisition of money."

I said, "We mustn't underestimate the necessity of money. I thought the other night that even Dr. Julian was troubled about financial matters."

"He is, I'm afraid," Lajoie admitted with reluctance. "He'll be retired from the university as soon as the war is over and I think he hasn't much private means. They've always had a high standard of living and I've heard that recently Dr. Julian has had some heavy losses. He's no financier. I believe he very unwisely signed a note for a friend—something one should never do."

The houseman appeared at the door and Lajoie asked for more cocktails.

Jeffrey said, "How about Dejon? Do you think he is sound?"

"I don't know," Lajoie answered slowly. "I don't know how to answer that, McNeill. Yes, I think he is sound. I like Walter. I never did believe the hints that Auger used to sprinkle around about Walter Dejon."

"What were the hints?" I asked. I thought it interesting that in the turn of the conversation everything seemed to radiate out, like spokes, from Auger.

"I never got any consecutive story," Lajoie said. "There were just damaging fragments of suggestions here and there about Walter's having had an early enthusiasm for, or even perhaps an association with, the

Nazis. I know that this suggestion used to drive Walter into a state of great excitement and anger. You remember his behavior when he unwrapped the little lead Nazi soldier at his birthday party?"

We said that we remembered.

"I fancy Auger had sent him that, purely to torment him. Talbert once said he thought Auger was actually blackmailing Walter, getting quite a considerable sum of money from him by threatening to report to the F.B.I. That would have extremely serious consequences, for if Dejon did ever have any connection with the Nazi party he must have hidden that fact when making out his questionnaire before being passed for the unit. Any failure to report the whole truth about one's self and one's past would be severely punished with fines and imprisonment."

"Blackmailing pressure would come hard on Dejon," Jeffrey said. "He always gives an impression of being in such straits."

"It requires a great deal of money to keep Cynthia happy," I said.

The men made no comment, nor was it necessary.

The houseman passed the second lot of old-fashioneds and we mashed our lemons and drank slowly, watching the birds in the garden. Long glass doors were open to a flagged terrace and a smell of sweet, damp grass and evening came in pleasantly.

We talked for a time about the unit and its members but nothing was said that was new to us or of special significance. But we had had a genial hour and I felt that Jeffrey too had appreciated the charm of Lajoie and the integrity of his personality.

When we left I felt less tired and strained than I had since the Zunyer episode.

Our way home took us past the Dejons' house and there as we came along were Walter and Cynthia rushing out to get into their car. They stopped a second in flight, hailed us, and asked where we were bound for; they were going to a dinner party at the Bonners'—think of that for an honor! It was all because of Cynthia's bronze dress. It was causing such a stir in academic circles that everyone wanted to see it and censor it.

"Where have you two been?" Cynthia called out to us as she got into their car. "You look all replete with alcohol and sin."

We slowed down, driving along beside them, and I explained that we had been taking part in an orgy—cocktails with Dr. Lajoie.

Walter laughed. He said, "Then that's why old Reynaud didn't show up as usual. He's Cynthia's latest boy friend, Anne. For weeks now he's been the hypotenuse of our little family triangle. Next week I'm going to fling a gardening glove in his face and challenge him to a duel to the death with bread knives in our back yard at dawn."

Cynthia said with impatience, "Don't be a complete ass, Walter. If we don't hurry we'll be late."

Jeffrey said, "You couldn't choose bread knives. The one who is challenged has the choice of weapons."

And I thought that if Dr. Lajoie were dueling he would choose beautiful pistols with ivory handles, or else thin rapiers with silver hilts and engraved blades.

The Dejons drove on and we followed at a more leisurely pace and in a very few minutes were home. As we were putting the car in the garage I said, "We don't seem to have been following the yellow-horse motif, Jeffrey."

"No," he answered, "I'm waiting for Bard to bring me the photographs of the group, then we'll see the Julian grandchildren again and try to get something more definite out of them."

I said, "Wouldn't it have been better, perhaps, to try to trace the horse's purchaser through the various stores selling such things here in town?"

"Bard's men have done that. He told me this morning they couldn't get any line on it at all. No, we'll just hope to be able to pry something from the children."

We went into the house then and I had a very happy time with our own little child, giving him a bath with pink celluloid fishes and a whole navy of boats.

That evening Bard brought around the photographs of the members of the unit.

In the morning we had an early breakfast and took the photographs around to the Julians' before we were due at the laboratory. It was a lovely day, sunny with a little wind and not too hot. The children, in blue sun suits, were playing by the pool. It took some minutes to corral them and get their interest but we finally managed this. Jeffrey had sat on the grass and was playing a game of cards with the photographs, spreading them out in front of him.

"What's he doing?" Blake asked, hopping up and down on one foot. "I'm a stork, Mrs. McNeill. Look, I'm a stork with one leg. See—I can go around everywhere on one leg. What's Dr. McNeill doing?"

"Playing a game."

"What sort of a game?" Christopher asked, coming nearer. "Blake's silly, isn't he? Blake's always silly."

"It's a game with prizes," Jeffrey said. "If you can pick out the person who brought that yellow rubber horse here to the pool and blew him up with the bicycle pump, then I give you a prize."

They wanted to know if it was a good prize and would they like it.

"It is a good prize and you will like it," Jeffrey said.

"Okay then—okay," Blake shouted. "That's easy." He leaned over and looked at the faces staring up at him. "That's the one," he said. "That's the one who brought the rubber horse, isn't it, Christopher?"

Christopher came over and looked too. He said, "Yep, that's the one. That's the very one."

They had picked out a photograph of Lajoie.

We thanked the children and Jeffrey gave them as reward for this dismaying piece of information two small boats, donated to the cause by Michael. Mrs. Julian came out of the house and said that she was so sorry not to be able to ask us in to breakfast, but she was afraid they had just had the last drop of coffee. We shouted back to her that we had had our breakfast, thank you, and was her husband in.

"He went down to the laboratory early," she said. "He is so worried about poor young Morse. I declare, I don't know what can be done about that boy, he's in such an emotionally fanatical condition."

We said, gloomily and loudly, that we didn't know either, said good-by, and went back to our car. I carried the envelope of photographs and wondered if Jeffrey felt as unhappy about this development as I.

We had driven a block or two when I remembered I had not told Mary that Michael was to go to a birthday party that afternoon. Jeffrey was distinctly opposed to my going home and straightening this matter out.

"But we'll be at the laboratory before nine as it is," I said. "The world is not going to crash into pieces if I take five minutes for Michael. Please now, be reasonable."

So reluctantly he drove home and glowered when I got out.

A tall, very thin woman was just turning away from our front door. She came down to us and said, "Mrs. McNeill?"

I admitted that I was and remembered where I had seen her before.

She said, "I'm glad I caught you and the doctor. I came early because I was afraid you'd be out, and then when I found you were out, I thought, 'Oh, now I've nerved myself all up to come for nothing.' "

I said, "Why did you have to nerve yourself up to come to us?"

"Because it's sort of a funny thing, I thought perhaps I'd better tell you. I don't know whether you'd be interested or not but I wouldn't want to go to the police, and you see, I saw you come to the house when he died so I knew you were interested in some way."

"When who died, Mrs.—er . . . ?" Jeffrey said.

"I'm Mrs. Clinton. It's my house where Mr. Auger rented a room."

Jeffrey moved over in the car to the seat nearer the sidewalk. He said, "Was there something about Mr. Auger that you wanted to tell us?"

She seemed embarrassed. "Well, it's this way," she said. "That young girl he was engaged to has been around asking a lot of questions about things and it made me wonder. She wanted to know if anybody went up to his room that afternoon and if there was any sound of quarreling or fighting or anything. Well, I told her no, I didn't see a soul go up there and I didn't hear a thing, and I didn't *hear* anything, that's the honest truth—and I don't know—perhaps I was just imagining that she was hinting something, or perhaps she was imagining something——"

"Probably that," Jeffrey said. "You know what girls of that age are like. Sensational."

"That's just what I thought. So there's nothing in it and I won't bother you."

I said quickly, "But, Mrs. Clinton, since you are here you might as well tell us what you had in mind. It wouldn't do any harm, and then you wouldn't have had your trip out on the bus for nothing."

"That's true. Well, what it was is that I did see somebody come to that side entrance the afternoon Mr. Auger died. It was a tall man with gray hair, and he had on gray trousers and a dark blue jacket, a sort of foreign-looking man, I thought. He went in the side entrance and I heard him go up the stairs and then pretty soon he came down again and went out, looking white as a sheet."

"Have you any idea who it was?" Jeffrey asked.

"No, none at all."

"Can you give any more of a description?"

She couldn't go beyond the details she had told us.

"Where were you at the time?" Jeffrey asked.

"I? Oh, I was in my dining-room bay window. I suppose he couldn't see me because of the drapes there. Now I don't suppose there is anything in this——"

"I doubt it," Jeffrey said. "But thank you. It was kind of you to come. I wouldn't mention the matter to anyone. . . . Anne, if you'll hurry with what you have to say to Mary we'll run Mrs. Clinton over to the bus as we go."

XIV

We went down to the laboratory and I went in to Dr. Julian's room to have Pauline check my bibliographical material out of the safe. Dr. Julian wasn't there and I didn't stay to talk at all to Pauline, for I wanted to finish the conversation that Jeffrey and I had been having after we had dropped Mrs. Clinton at her bus.

Back in my office Jeffrey sat on a corner of the behemoth machine and I sat at my desk and put my filing cards in order.

He said, "Of course that woman's description fits Torgerson. He usually wears gray flannel trousers and a blue coat, doesn't he?"

"I'm afraid he does."

"Still, plenty of others do too. You couldn't convict a man on that evidence."

"No, and neither could you convict a man on the evidence of two little featherheaded children like Blake and Christopher. You can't place any reliance on them. Can you imagine Lajoie, with his quality of patriotism, offering the unit's process to Zunyer?"

"Perhaps his protestations of patriotism are a blind."

"I don't believe so. He is so fundamentally consistent."

"You don't know him well enough to be sure of that. Undoubtedly Zunyer is paying well for what he wants——"

"Jeffrey," I interrupted. "What are we going to do about that two thousand dollars of his in our bank? It's been worrying me."

"Turn it and the diamond clips over to the government. It's not been worrying me."

I said, "That's all right then. But as to Lajoie, I don't believe he would be influenced by money. Except for Helen Haleck, he seems to be the one person in the unit who has what he wants."

"Well, I don't know. We'll have to ask him about the rubber horse. I can't see that there is any other way." He sat drumming his fingers on his knee and then he got up and went out, saying he was going to see Lajoie.

In about five minutes they came back. I thought this was going to be awkward, but Lajoie had the grace to make it easy for us. I don't know what he suspected.

He said, "Your husband tells me he is trying to trace some information about a yellow rubber horse, Mrs. McNeill, and that the Julian children are under the impression that I brought it to their pool and blew it up with a bicycle pump and careened around the pool on it, giving them rides. Now I assure you that I have never, to my knowledge, even seen a yellow rubber horse with black spots."

"I didn't think you would have," I said. "It isn't the sort of article at all appropriate to your personality."

He smiled and asked what sort of object I thought would be appropriate.

"A grand piano, an original Dürer, a bowl of Steuben glass with bell-shaped flowers."

That pleased him. He said, "You are discerning, and appreciative, Anne McNeill."

Jeffrey did not like having the conversation wander down such a pleasant bypath. He hauled it back, saying, "You weren't at the Julians' pool on the afternoon of Walter's birthday party?"

"That was also the day Ames Auger died, wasn't it? No, I didn't go near the Julians' that day, at least not nearer than the Dejons' terrace when we were all there. . . . Anne, your husband is striking terror to my soul with his inquisitorial manner."

I said, "I know. It's formidable, but superficial."

"The superficial is never formidable," Lajoie said, "so I can't quite believe you." He took cigarettes from his pocket, offered them to us, and took one himself. After lighting them he said, "I can only repeat that I know nothing about the yellow horse, and that, unfortunately, I cannot supply an alibi for that particular afternoon. I spent most of it in the university library looking up some rare German articles in reference to our work."

It was at this point that Dr. Julian came in, and I did feel a slight awkwardness now.

Lajoie, leaning against the sink, smoking, was a nonchalant, attractive figure. His grayish hair was slightly rumpled. I always liked the keenness of his face and expression and the humor in his eyes.

He said, "Doctor, McNeill here is giving me the 'woiks.' There seems to be some inexplicable connection between a yellow rubber horse and that unfortunate man who was shot on the roof yesterday; at least I gather that is the reason for today's interest in so unlikely a subject."

Dr. Julian said impatiently, "Why not take that up some other time, McNeill? I really think you and Joan must have been mistaken about it. I can't see its importance."

"Preserve my reputation and explain that I never did go swimming astride it in your pool like a fantastic water god," Lajoie said.

"Of course he didn't." Dr. Julian was annoyed. "He never gets near my pool anyway. He has an aversion to cold water. I've never seen him in a bathing suit."

"That's all right then," Jeffrey said. "I just happen to want to find out who bought it and so on. It's immaterial at present."

"I should say so," Dr. Julian said, "in comparison with our real and immediate problem. I refer to poor Tom Morse. Talbert reported that he talked with him until midnight last night in the most wild and distressing manner. I declare, I don't know what we should do about him. Perhaps the time has come when we must turn him over to the F.B.I."

"No, no," Lajoie protested. "Don't do that yet. I must say I do not like our worthy Mr. Bard."

Jeffrey said, "Do you think there is any danger of Morse's doing what he suggested: publishing abroad information about this project?"

"I think he is far too loyal," I said.

Dr. Julian nodded at me gratefully and said he thought so too, at least he had until the last day or two when Morse had seemed to be becoming more and more excitable and difficult. Perhaps he should not have been taken into the unit in the first place, but he was one of the most brilliant of graduate students and hadn't shown any evidence of this curious religious instability. The trouble was that he was really and literally convinced that the unit was working under the inspiration and direction of Satan. It was a heartbreaking responsibility to know what to do. If they handed Morse over to Bard the boy would be put away for ten years or so, and that was a cruel thing to contemplate for a person as sensitive and scientifically able as he.

Jeffrey said, "They keep stressing at Washington that we can't consider the individual in this project. What seems to me more important than Morse's sensitiveness or scientific ability is his inherited gift of speech. If he were worse—I mean in a serious enough state so that he would be a recognized schizophrenic—we could put him away for a while, but as he is people would listen to what he says and believe him. We can't let him loose in an asylum or a jail where he would have an opportunity to talk and preach and warn the inmates and staff and employees of what is being done in these laboratories."

"I'm desperate, wondering what to do about him," Dr. Julian said. "We can't muzzle the boy."

"Certainly he can't be allowed to give the thing away," Lajoie said. "Just picture what will happen if he gets the ear of a newspaper man."

We regarded this picture with apprehension.

Dr. Julian said, "I sometimes think that a man's conscience is a more potentially powerful force than our X itself, my dear Joan."

"What did they say in Washington about Morse, McNeill?" Lajoie asked. "Did you discuss him with them?"

"Yes, the last time I went down. They said keep him here and watch him carefully. They are fully aware of the danger of turning him loose onto an institution."

"It's extremely serious," Dr. Julian said. "Well, I mustn't stay here any longer—'fanning the breeze,' the undergraduates call it. Shall we go, Lajoie? . . . How is the bibliography coming along, Joan? Fascinating, absorbing occupation, isn't it?"

I said that it was indeed most interesting and he and Lajoie went out. Jeffrey looked out of the window, gloomily, and then said that he had better be going along to the laboratory across the hall. He might be able to do something on the scientific side, at least wash some glassware, since he didn't seem to be able to accomplish anything more valuable. He didn't see any way at all out of this chaos. He was completely at a loss. I knew he was at that stage where kind words of encouragement only infuriate one, so I said nothing. He went off and in a few minutes I saw that it would be advisable to go downstairs to the library and look up some more references to uranium isotopes. Just as I was going out of my door I met Mr. Bard coming down the hall.

I fetched Jeffrey and another stool from the laboratory and Mr. Bard said he had come to report on the findings of his men in regard to Zunyer. The real estate men who handled property on the Melon Seeds had finally got in touch with a man named Brown who owned the house Zunyer had been in. Mr. Brown said he didn't know a thing about Zunyer except that he had come to the office, had seemed an agreeable, reliable sort of person, had said his name was Frank Zuego, of Portuguese extraction. He had said that he was an importer and exporter of china, that he lived in Montevideo and had just come to New York to look into the question of postwar North American markets. He had given a Montevideo address and references and had paid five hundred dollars cash down for a month's use of his house on the island. Brown had let him have it and had been astonished when Zuego disappeared without a word. Where he had gone Brown had no idea nor had anyone else. The F.B.I. had telegraphed authorities in Montevideo and found that the address and references were false.

"So we're held up again," Bard said. "I don't know what to do now and that's a fact."

"How about the Long Island lead? Have you been able to find out anything about that sister and Zunyer's chicken farm?"

"Not a thing yet, although we're working on it. But you were wrong on your angle of it, McNeill. There were hundreds of farms handling Plymouth Rocks in 1937. It's some job to sift through those."

We sat looking at each other gloomily.

Bard said, "I'd like to take another look at that notebook of Auger's. The one the pages were cut out of. Can you get hold of it, McNeill?"

Jeffrey went off and came back shortly with a large gray notebook. To me its contents meant nothing: pages of incomprehensible figures and symbols, equations, formulas, and graphs. I doubt if Bard understood more than I did although he pretended to be intelligent about it. I don't know what they hoped to find, examining it so carefully. They came to that place where the pages had been removed and Bard took a small magnifying glass from his pocket and he and Jeffrey looked through that at the edges of the cut.

"I think they've been snipped out with very small scissors," Jeffrey said. "This doesn't look to me as if it had been done with a knife."

"Would it be possible to identify the scissors, do you think, if we could find them?"

"Very possibly; you notice there is a very slight recurrent curve of the line."

Bard said, "I've been thinking a lot about that suggestion of yours that it wasn't suicide, Dr. McNeill. I don't think you have enough yet to substantiate that theory."

"I know I haven't."

"And that angle of the situation fogs the real important issue of Zunyer and the other man Pierre on the roof."

"Does it though?"

"Yes, I think it does, definitely."

Bard and Jeffrey talked further on the subject of Pierre and Zunyer and finally, in discouragement, Mr. Bard said he had better be going along.

After that events fell into the more ordered routine of science. Jeffrey disappeared and I worked on the bibliography all morning and went home to a happy lunch with Michael. The afternoon was uneventful except that just before Jeffrey and I were leaving Dr. Julian came into my room with the temporary solution of one of the problems.

He said, "Well, McNeill, I think I've worked out what to do with Morse at least two or three days. Dr. Lajoie suggested that I put him and Morse on twenty-four-hour duty here. They can have cots in the common room and take turns getting a little sleep at night and in that way Lajoie can keep an eye on him, not let him talk to any outsiders, and also try to bring him into a more reasonable frame of mind. If anyone can do it Lajoie can."

I doubted if anyone could and wondered if this were such a good plan, for Lajoie's convictions in regard to one's obligations to the country were almost as ardent as Morse's in regard to one's obligations to God. It seemed to me that here was ground cleared and made ready for battle. But perhaps not. Lajoie was wise and gifted with tact. He might influence Morse.

Jeffrey approved the plan and I took my cards and notebook and scrap papers into Dr. Julian's office. Since Pauline had left, the doctor locked my papers into the safe and then I went back to Jeffrey.

It was pleasant to think that we would be home in time for late tea, that we could lie on long chairs out in the garden and watch Michael, that perhaps we could have a leisurely dinner and get to bed fairly early. It would be a delight to have a few hours without the problems of the unit battering at one's brain.

I leaned back in the corner of my seat, closed my eyes, and Jeffrey said, "You know, Anne, I'd like to look over Auger's papers again. Julian and I did just after Auger's death but we were looking for the missing pages and so may have skipped something that might be significant now."

"Pauline got all his personal papers and things, didn't she?" I asked, remembering that poor Auger had had no relative at his bleak, small funeral.

"Yes, she has them all, unless she's destroyed them. Let's go to her room now."

Reluctantly I relinquished my dream of tea in the back garden and we drove on to the frame house on the side street where Pauline had her room.

We went upstairs and found the bed-sitting room, the nondescript furniture, the magazines and few current novels that one would expect. We found, however, what we did not expect, and that was Sam Talbert sprawled out smoking in a wicker chair. After a moment it did occur to him that I was standing and he got up and said that Pauline was in the kitchen digging up a drink or two and wouldn't we sit down, she'd be back in a minute.

She came in in a fresh blue-and-white dirndl with her hair braided in two pigtails, and I thought she looked like a charming Bavarian fairy-tale maiden with her tray and glasses and bottles of beer.

I think she was embarrassed at our finding Talbert there, but there was no reason in the world why she should have been. I hoped that he and she would patch it up and marry, eventually. We drank our beer and talked a little about the unit, about Tom Morse and Lajoie and also about yesterday's affair of the man on the roof. Talbert was in one of his less aggressive moods and therefore more appealing. I thought he had a good deal of sense and sincerity. If only he would brush his hair more often and take better care of his clothes he would be quite an attractive young person.

Pauline had curled up among her gay cushions on the couch. She said, "You know, it's funny the way things come out about people, isn't it? I mean, from the most absolutely improbable sources. I was having my hair done the other day and there was a woman there who was going over to England in a day or so. She had lived in Burma for a while, and she was talking about it and how lucky she was to have got out before the Japs came. She said there was a lot of fifth-column activity there before the Japs invaded. And then she said a funny thing. She said, 'What a small place the world is after all——' "

"My good girl, if you think that is funny," Talbert said, "your sense of humor is as rudimentary as the egg."

"Your sense of politeness is as rudimentary as the egg. Don't interrupt," she answered. "No, this woman said, 'There's a girl here in town who was in Burma when I first went out there. Very attractive and with a lot of money. She was having quite an affair with a Spanish gentleman at the time. But she and her father left soon and came back to the States.' "

Talbert said, "What is there so humorous in that?"

"Will you be still! I'm leading up to my climax."

"Okay. You've led up. Let's have it."

"She was talking about Helen Haleck! What do you think of that!"

I'm afraid Pauline was disappointed in our reaction. It was hard to know what comment to make.

I said something about a lot of water having gone under the bridge since that time, which meant nothing but filled in a pause. Jeffrey made no effort to say anything more than, "Indeed." And Talbert said he had always thought that gal had had a merry past.

After this Jeffrey asked if we might look over Auger's papers again and Pauline pulled a large box out from under the bed. We all sat on the floor and embarked upon the dreary task of examining the possessions of the dead. We looked through the pockets of Ames's one brown suit, of his two pairs of gray flannel trousers; we looked through five books on assorted mathematical and scientific subjects, and through a very small pile of bills and a few letters on cheap lined paper from an aunt in southern California. As before, I was impressed by the pitiful meagerness of Ames's worldly goods. Beneath some underclothes in one corner of the box Jeffrey came upon a small black address book.

He glanced in this and then said, "I wonder if you'd mind my taking this back to look through later?"

Pauline said she wouldn't mind in the least. I thought she was somewhat anxious to have us go.

Talbert bundled Ames's effects back into the box and shoved it under the bed.

We thanked Pauline for the beer and for showing us Ames's things and left them and went on home.

XV

Although it was too late for tea we went out into the back garden and I did lie in a long chair and Michael came and climbed over it and said we were sailing on the ocean in a boat and a Jap plane was going to fly over us and drop a bomb that would blow up the whole world —"Booom, booom, boom!"

I said, "Jeffrey, even the babes know about it!"

He didn't pay any attention. He was sitting on the grass beside us looking through the black address book. He said, "Here's a number I'd like to look up: 'Geraldine Dejon, Yonkers 3-0412.' We may get a line there on Auger's relationship with Walter. And here's another: 'Z-346M, Bellport.' "

"Could that possibly be Zunyer?" I asked in excitement, and sat up.

"Let's call up and see what you get. It wouldn't do any harm to try, I should think."

"Wait until a little later," I suggested. "People are more apt to be home nearer dinnertime."

So I lay back again, and Michael rushed about shouting, "Zzzzzzzzis—Zzzzzziiisssss—booomybooomybooom," and Jeffrey went into the house and I wondered if I ever again could really like that lilac bush behind which Zunyer and Pierre had hidden or if always, when I looked at it, I would imagine I saw their crouching shadows. Then I thought of Lajoie and Tom Morse and wondered how they were getting on and what would be the final solution in regard to Tom. But that which distressed me most was the matter of Hans Torgerson and Helen Haleck.

Quietly, little by little, we had been acquiring quite a list of damaging details about those two: Hans's original idea stolen by Ames; the report of Ames's landlady about the gray-haired man with the gray trousers and blue jacket; the phrase "John Hutardo's cat"; and now this bit of gossip about Helen and the Spaniard in Burma. Konrad had said that his father had gone to Burma. Still, Zunyer was surely not the only one of that race there.

I thought, "But surely Helen is no John Hutardo's cat," and then remembered that she had said she was not bound by conventional allegiances; she had scorned such slogans as "dying for your country." Perhaps she, who had lived in so many lands, felt that one was as good as another, that she owed nothing here in loyalty. Perhaps she had promised to sell information to Zunyer, and Ames had discovered this and threatened to report her to the F.B.I., and Hans, terrified at this and angry as well at the fact of the stolen idea, had put benzedrine and phenobarbital into Ames's chowder that day at lunch, and then later in the afternoon had gone to Ames's room, found him dead or dying, typed the suicide note, and put the bottle of sedative tablets on the table by his bed. Then he had come downstairs again and the landlady, peeking out from behind her "drapes" in the bay window, had seen him going off as white as a sheet.

It all hung together, all of it. Dreadfully!

Except why had they not simply sold their information to Zunyer and not involved me?

Had Hans cut those pages out of Ames's notebook?

I suppose he could have done so. Undoubtedly at one time or another those notebooks of the members of the unit must lie around on the benches in the laboratory, for the jotting down of notes on experiments and so on. Probably Hans could have cut out the pages and not been seen.

But still, why didn't he sell out to Zunyer and not involve me?

No, perhaps the plan involving Zunyer was entirely Helen's and Hans Torgerson refused to fall in with it, and she, finding herself unable to deliver the good red wine to Zunyer as advertised, had been afraid of offering him vinegar and had told him that I knew everything about the unit and was ready to sell out Jeffrey. A foolish suggestion and farfetched, but obviously it took Zunyer in.

I had worked out a very depressing story and one which I thoroughly disliked. But now, having the answers to everything, I went in and found Jeffrey.

He was sitting in the living room, slumped down in a deep chair and looking miserable.

I said, "Darling, I'm afraid I have the whole thing right in the bag for you. Do you want it now or shall we wait until after dinner?"

"Hand it over now," he said. He sat up, looking interested and slightly more cheerful.

So I sat down and took a cigarette and told him what I thought about Helen and Hans.

He said, "It's logical, and there are one or two items that you have skipped."

"What are they?"

"The fact that you saw Helen Haleck on the top floor of the chemical building. She might have gone there to look into the little matter of that listening tube. And then, remember what you heard Torgerson say when you were listening out on the roof."

"That's true. That makes it all look blacker than ever."

He said, "I think we'll have to have a talk with Torgerson and Helen. I'll go and telephone them now."

I took Michael in by way of the kitchen to speak to Mary. It is an extremely modern kitchen that looks like a small superior "Joe's diner," with stove, icebox, and shelves all concealed beneath a long gleaming white counter. You are supposed to sit on stools at the counter and have some member of the family slide hamburger sandwiches at you for meals, but we seldom do. We usually eat conventionally and more elaborately in the dining room. And Mary looks anachronistic in this environment, stumping around in her Victorian maid's uniforms.

I often wish that I had lived in the Victorian age.

As Michael and I were starting upstairs Jeffrey called me from the telephone closet so I joined him and he said that Hans and Helen were coming around tonight.

He said, "I also called that Yonkers number—Geraldine Dejon. I'm afraid I got her just as she was getting dinner because she seemed a bit short at first, but then I told her who I was and asked her if she were any relation to Walter and she said yes, she was his second cousin."

"Did you give any explanation for asking these questions?"

"Why should I? Explanations waste time."

"She must have thought it extraordinary."

"I don't care what she thought. Then I asked her if she had known Ames Auger, and she said she did know him. She seemed quite shocked when I told her he was dead. I couldn't get much out of her after that so I asked her if she would meet you at lunch day after tomorrow in New York at the club, Anne. One o'clock? She couldn't make it tomorrow. Is that all right with you?"

I said that it was quite all right and that I should be glad to go to the city anyway to do some shopping. But I was sorry for the mystification of Geraldine Dejon.

"Now there's another number I want to call up; at least I'd like you to, if you will," he said. "This one in Bellport. 346M."

I took his place at the telephone, put in the long-distance call, and waited. In less than two minutes the operator said, "Ready with your Bellport call."

I said, "Hello, is this 346-M?"

A small boy's voice answered, "Yes, it is."

"Mr. Zunyer's house?"

A pause and then, "No, it isn't Mr. Zunyer's house."

I thought, "It sounds like Konrad."

"But may I speak to Mr. Zunyer then?"

"There isn't any Mr. Zunyer here," and the receiver on the other end was hung up.

I looked up at Jeffrey and said, "It was a little boy. It sounded very much like Konrad."

"Perhaps we've hit it!" He said, "I'll call Bard at once and set his men on the job."

It was maddening beyond words at this important moment not to be able to reach Mr. Bard at either his apartment or his office and to have the office closed. We wasted perhaps ten minutes trying to get him, and then when Jeffrey telephoned the New York office their lines were busy. It was at least half an hour before he got through to them. He told them to get the address from that Bellport number and then to have the local police send someone around there at once to question the members of the household about Zunyer. The New York office was inclined to hesitate because they thought we were placing too much reliance on the sound of a small boy's voice. And I too, when we thought it over, felt that I might have been mistaken.

In the midst of all this Michael had been shouting at me to come up and give him his bath, which I finally did.

We kept our dinner waiting, which caused the roast chicken to be dry and overdone, which depressed Mary. She was further depressed when Helen and Hans arrived as we were beginning our dessert.

They refused the lemon soufflé but accepted cigarettes and we sat about the dining-room table and talked.

Our wide glass windows were open toward the back garden and we looked out onto the dusk following sunset and I wished that our conversation were of happier matters, for this was serious and difficult.

I sensed in their manner that they were on the defensive and more than a little antagonistic: an unhappy circumstance, since I liked them both so well and valued them as friends.

They spent no time in beating about the bush. Helen Haleck said, "Well, Jeffrey, what's on your mind? Why are we summoned to the throne?"

He said, "There are a few questions I'd like to ask, Helen. In the first place, do you or Torgerson know anything about the purchase of a yellow rubber horse with spots?"

She looked at me and smiled. "Anne, my dear," she said, "of course I have no medical degree but it seems to me that Jeffrey is revealing certain shameful symptoms."

"This is important," Jeffrey said with annoyance.

"They always think their obsessions are, Anne," she said. "I know an awfully good little place up in the Berkshires where he could go for a few months and come out simply a new man."

"I don't want a new man," I said.

Torgerson seemed not to approve of this badgering of Jeffrey. He said, "Let us take this in a different mood, Helen. I think Dr. McNeill is sincerely desiring some information from us two."

He said, "I am, Torgerson, and I think there's no use in going about this tentatively. I want some explanations from you both, and if you won't give them to me, then you will have to do so to Bard of the F.B.I."

Torgerson looked like a man who has just received news that he has been convicted of a serious charge. He put out his hand, took my goblet of water, and drank from it. He said, "The F.B.I., McNeill? That has not a pleasant sound."

Jeffrey said, "Now, please, in the first place, how about the yellow rubber horse?"

They both answered at once that they knew nothing about any rubber horse. Hans had never to his knowledge even seen one and Helen Haleck said she had had no more intimate acquaintance with any rubber horses than in passing plate-glass windows of sporting goods shops.

Jeffrey then let the subject of the horse drop. He said, "Torgerson, on the day of Ames Auger's death, did you go to his room at any time in the afternoon?"

He and Helen looked at each other. The Norwegian seemed to be stricken, and I have never felt such tension in my dining room. He said, "It is true, McNeill. I did go there. I found him dead."

"You are sure of this?"

"Yes. Sure."

"What time was this?"

"At five o'clock–a little after."

"I see. Did you touch anything in the room?"

"Nothing! Certainly nothing. Why should I touch anything?"

"All right. Why didn't you inform Dr. Julian or myself or the police that he was dead?"

Perspiration was showing on the man's forehead. He said miserably, "Yes, why did I not? I should have. That was where I made my great mistake. That is what Helen said also. She said, 'My God, Hans, you should have notified the authorities at once. Now it is too late.' You see, I could not tell her this until just before that supper at Walter Dejon's."

"It was too late to say anything then, Jeffrey," Helen said.

"It was late, certainly," Jeffrey admitted. "But why didn't you report it at once, Torgerson?"

The man went into a nervous staccato explanation that he was afraid of the police, that perhaps it was because of what the Gestapo had done to his wife and boy that he had such a deep-seated fear of falling into the clutches of men of that sort. As he had stood there looking down at Ames Auger he had told himself that he must inform someone at once, that that was his duty, but after he had left and was walking around the streets he was nearly beside himself. It was a bad thing, it was a suspicious circumstance to be the first to find a man dead. There would be questions by the authorities, and he did not know the language well and he would become nervous and confused and give the wrong answers. And then too all that would interfere with his work on the unit, and that was of paramount importance—more important by far than the individual——

"That is quite true," Jeffrey said. "When you were there, Torgerson, did you notice whether or not there was any bottle of phenobarbital tablets on the table beside his bed?"

"I think there was not. I am quite sure there was not. That was what seemed to Helen and me so strange when we heard the details of your having found him. I told Helen I was sure there had been no bottle of tablets there then. So who had placed them there, and why? And that intensified my anxiety."

"Why did you go there that afternoon?" Jeffrey asked.

"To talk to Auger about my idea which he had stolen. To ask him about his progress on it and to suggest that we work on together along those lines. In fact I had spoken about this to him before, but he was not amenable. He was, in fact, antagonistic in the extreme."

"I see," Jeffrey said. "One other thing about this. Was there a note, an open sheet of paper, on the bureau?"

"Nothing, nothing, I am quite sure again. That too seemed to us strange and foreboding when we heard of it. Someone, McNeill, came to Ames Auger's room after I was there, put the bottle of tablets on the table, and typed that suicide note. I hope you believe me. I do hope that you do, McNeill. Your country is in my heart and I would not do evil against it or any man. I have known too much of evil in my life."

He was shivering with emotion.

I got up, went into the pantry, and came back with soda, whisky, and glasses. Jeffrey poured drinks and handed one to Torgerson.

I gave a glass to Helen. She would need it. Her turn was coming next.

Jeffrey turned to her and said, "What does the expression 'John Hutardo's cat' mean?"

She said, "It's a Spanish phrase. John Hutardo's cat was a traitor. I don't know the rest of the story. I imagine it might be amusing."

"That's all right. We don't need to go into it. You are familiar with the Spanish language?"

"I speak it—French, German, and Italian too. Languages come easily to me."

"You have known Spanish people well?"

"Some very well; also French, German, Italians, and one Norwegian." She smiled at Hans who, now that he was off the rack, had a little more color.

"Did you have Spanish friends in Burma?"

She said, "So that tale has come around, has it? I wondered just how long it would take to reach this university. Isn't the grapevine wonderful! Really, the speed of the vindictive word!"

"I don't know that it was so vindictive," Jeffrey said. "Statements of facts are not vindictive necessarily. . . . Did you live with a certain Spaniard as his mistress?"

Hans Torgerson's face became a sudden furious red. He said, "McNeill, that is an insult, a question which I will not allow you to put to the woman who is to be my wife."

"There is no reason for us to employ Nice Nellieisms at this point," Jeffrey said.

"The Nice Nellieism—I do not understand you."

Helen interrupted Torgerson, saying, "It's an expression, Hans. Control the rage. I haven't any fondness for Nice Nellie either, Jeffrey McNeill. I did live with a Spaniard as his mistress but, Hans, that doesn't affect my feeling for you in the slightest degree. I'm sure you know that."

Jeffrey said, "Was this man's name Zunyer?"

"No, certainly not Zunyer."

"Zuego?"

"Not Zunyer nor Zuego nor Zola nor Zoroaster. His name was Ramon Del Orco. He looked a little as Don Quixote might have looked in his youth if he had not gone psychopathic and had been fifty per cent handsomer and seventy-five per cent better groomed."

I was relieved to see that Del Orco could not ever be mistaken for Zunyer.

"Where is this man now?" Jeffrey asked.

"I'm afraid the Japanese killed him by mistake in Burma. I have heard that rumor. And of course I'm sorry. He was a very courteous and charming and amusing man. But we lived together only a few months and by the end of that time we had entirely ceased caring for each other at all. It was over, Hans, my dear—completely."

"I know, I believe you," he said, but his voice sounded bleak.

"One or two more points," Jeffrey said. "Torgerson, what did you mean by that remark you made to Helen yesterday shortly after I shot the man on the roof? You and Helen were alone in the common room and you said, 'But what will they think if they find out, Helen?' and she answered, 'But they didn't see you, Hans.' "

"You heard that!" Torgerson exclaimed. "How could you have heard that?"

"They were listening through the tube, of course," Helen said. "Never underestimate the omnipresence of the McNeills, my dear Hans."

I thought for the first time that she seemed shaken.

"But of course I was referring to that which you already know," Torgerson said nervously. "I was referring to my having gone to Auger's room that afternoon. Ever since then I have been in great fear that someone should have seen me and thought I acted strangely not to report the death. I have never forgiven myself for having acted so unwisely. You see, here I look so guilty, and what can I say? Already I can see that there is no hope for me. None at all."

"Did you kill Auger?" Jeffrey asked bluntly.

"No, no. By no means. Of course I did not kill him!" Torgerson declared desperately. "How could I? He died of an overdose of phenobarbital, did he not?"

"I should say so," Jeffrey answered, and then asked, "Have you by any chance the pages cut from his notebook?"

I don't know whether or not Jeffrey believed him but I felt that Torgerson was telling the truth when he declared that he had not the pages, that he had not seen them, that he had no idea at all where they were. He was in such a state of nerves now that Jeffrey poured more whisky for him and then turned to Helen.

She said, "And now I suppose you are going to ask me what I was doing on the top floor of the chemistry building when Anne saw me there day before yesterday?"

"That was what I was going to ask you," Jeffrey said.

"I went up to take a reprint to Sam Talbert," she answered. "I left it in his room and that is the simple truth." Then her manner changed entirely to a deeply concerned sincerity. She leaned across the table toward Jeffrey and said, "I realize that circumstances have piled up very damagingly against us, Jeffrey."

"I'm afraid they have," he admitted.

"I don't know what we can say to convince you that we know nothing more about Ames Auger's death, or about that man on the roof, or a yellow rubber horse."

"These have to do with a very grave situation," he said.

It was almost dark by now. I got up from the table and pulled the heavy lined curtains across the windows, hooking them along the side so that no chink of light could show through.

Torgerson got up and stood holding onto the back of his chair. He said, "Are you about to be summoning the man from the F.B.I. now, McNeill?"

Jeffrey rose also. He said, "No, not tonight, Torgerson."

"Then we'll go along," Helen said.

"Oh, just one other matter," Jeffrey said as we were going out of the room. "At Walter's party, why, Torgerson, did you volunteer to telephone Ames Auger if you already knew that he was dead?"

This question caused poor Torgerson renewed anguish. He said, "There again I was making a mistake. But I thought then that if I telephoned, and people remembered, they would say, if the question ever arose, 'Why, Torgerson could not have known Auger was dead because he went and telephoned him in the middle of that supper party.' That was all, I assure you. That was my whole process of thought. But now from the bottom of my heart I wish I had told the authorities at once when I found him dead."

Jeffrey said, "That is what you should have done," and opened the front door for them.

I felt very unhappy about them as they went down the front walk. But when I went into our dark living room and pulled its curtains across the front window I saw Helen and Torgerson stop on the sidewalk and saw her put her arms around his neck and then he seemed to relax and take her in his arms. I did not watch to see the end of that embrace.

I hoped then that we might be able to go quickly to bed and to sleep, but one more incident occurred. Our telephone rang while I was having a shower. Dimly, through the rushing of the water, I heard Jeffrey's voice in the next room. When I went in there, all in blue silk and lace things, he said:

"The F.B.I. office in New York just called up with a report on that Bellport number. They sent a man around there but nobody was at home. The house was locked and dark. The local police said it was owned by a Miss

Hilda Smith and that she sometimes did have relatives staying there but she was a quiet woman who 'kept herself to herself' and no one knew her well. She had good standing in the town and no one knew anything about her relatives. She might very well just have gone off on some visit and temporarily closed her house, they said."

"How about that boy's little scared voice over the telephone?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"It makes me pretty sick to be hounding that child like this when he did so much for me."

He said, "My dear, if you would eliminate the element of personalities entirely from this case you would be less unhappy about it."

"But I never can eliminate them," I said. "I think that we can always find the solutions in the individual characteristics and peculiarities of personalities."

XVI

THE NEXT DAY, Friday, was one of those gray, oppressive days that sometimes come in the middle of summer, causing shortness of tempers and quick responses of irritation to small unimportant stimulations. It was very hot in the rooms of the unit, and there was a bad psychological atmosphere. Everyone seemed tired and withdrawn into individualistic and depressed detachment. There was no sense of unanimity of interest or effort. I say "everyone" was depressed, but that is not quite true, for Tom Morse seemed even more excited than usual, although this appeared at first only in his quick, tense motions and his haggard appearance.

Lajoie came into my office and talked with us about Morse. He said they had not had much sleep during their periods of twenty-four-hour duty. They had worked hard in the laboratory and during rests had sat in Lajoie's room, made coffee over a Bunsen burner, and had long "bull sessions." Lajoie admitted that he seemed not to have made any impression at all on Morse and that he was worried. The boy was more than ever convinced that this work was a "flying in the face of the Almighty" and that it must be stopped, and stopped at once.

Jeffrey said, "Then we'll have to hand him over to Bard."

"Let me have another day on him," Lajoie said. "I haven't given up hope yet," and he and Jeffrey went off together.

I turned my attention again to the bibliography and after a while Helen Haleck came in. The long gray laboratory coats are becoming to her. But she looked pale today.

She sat on the edge of the great apparatus and smoked a cigarette. I wondered what she had come for and if some vital information would be forthcoming, but I kept on making out my cards.

She said, "If they don't jail Hans and me by next Saturday, we hope you and Jeffrey will come to our wedding."

Naturally I stopped work on the cards at that and said all the proper things and tried to appear enthusiastic and blithe about her announcement; but we both lacked the usual lighthearted joy of anticipation that consideration of a wedding evokes. She had introduced her invitation by too unpleasant a thought.

She took another cigarette and said somberly that she certainly hoped they wouldn't be sent down to Leavenworth or to any similar foul dungeon, that she wouldn't pretend to enjoy it herself and it would fairly kill Hans, who had been through enough hells as it was. And the worst of it was that he had such a high regard for this country, that he felt he owed it so much, that he had been so filled with joy at being able to work on this project.

"This suspicion is breaking him in pieces!" she said, and went and looked out of the open window.

I was very sorry for her and for Hans, but what could I do except go on with my work?

After a few moments she left and I went down to the library for a while and looked up references there. It was ten minutes of twelve when I came up to the unit again. No one was about in the corridors or in the smaller rooms and laboratories so I went into the large laboratory and found everyone there.

They had stopped their activities and were sitting on the high stools or leaning against sinks and benches, listening to Dr. Julian, who was saying:

"I have just received word that none of the samples by the process we have been trying have shown any enrichment of U-235. We have so far eliminated three possibilities, each of which in turn we believed would be the answer. If poor Auger had lived, I feel that the process he had in mind might have been of considerable value. It might not. I should not dare allow myself to be unduly optimistic. We are, as you are all well aware, seeking a simpler, less costly method of developing atomic power than that which is already known to be possible. We are seeking a . . ." He hesitated for the apt word, which Lajoie supplied.

"We are seeking a Northwest Passage, an easier, more direct way of getting there."

"And if we find it," Talbert said, "if there actually is such a way, then Hitler and his boys may very well get there first."

Then Pauline said, perhaps injudiciously, but with wisdom, "I should think that it would be better for the United States not to find any simpler method. If the development of this power is so fantastically difficult and expensive, then we may be able to keep it in our own hands, but if it is simplified and cheapened, then any quarreling little nation can get hold of it and we'll all be blown off the globe."

"That's why it has to be internationalized!" Talbert said loudly.

"All of this philosophical analysis has no place in our considerations," Dr. Julian said. "Atomic power is inevitable, for good or evil, right or wrong, and as to our particular project, even if we have no spectacular success, nevertheless we have the satisfaction of being part of the greatest scientific project that has ever been undertaken in the history of the world——"

I was watching his eager, rapt expression. I didn't see what happened.

There was a sudden, violent, deafening explosion; broken glass flying; Pauline screaming and screaming; the sound of a roar of flames and the sight of flame in a sheet and leaping tongues lapping the benches and the walls at the other end of the laboratory, and Tom Morse's coat flaming up, horribly, like a picture I had seen in a film of a Filipino boy afire from a flame thrower. But Talbert beat out Morse's burning coat.

"Get out–get out, everybody!" Lajoie shouted.

I heard Dr. Julian crying out, "The uranium–save the uranium," and there was a confusion of shouting, of the dreadful sound of the fire, and then more explosions, one after another.

Someone cried out, "The ether cans!" and Jeffrey had my arm and was pushing me toward the door, for the room was now full of choking smoke and I thought I could never get as far as the door without breathing.

Pauline was screaming again and I saw that her laboratory coat was on fire and she was trying to beat out the flame with her hands. Jeffrey grabbed off his coat and wrapped it around her. We were all trying to get out of the door now, jammed together for a moment in a frantic group while the fire surged forward to reach us.

Morse fell onto the floor; Jeffrey turned from Pauline and Talbert joined him and they hoisted Morse up with their hands under his armpits; he dragged limply. Then we were pushing each other out into the safety of the corridor and somebody slammed the door behind us.

Pauline's hands were burned, and she was leaning against Talbert, moaning and weeping. Most of Walter Dejon's hair was burned off.

There followed indescribable confusion, all taking place in thick and vile-smelling smoke. People outside began banging on the unit's corridor doors, someone opened these, and students, faculty members, and employees came pouring in. Some were dragging the fire hose, which they turned on in the corridor, soaking down the woodwork around the doors. But those who were holding the hose were excited and as they directed the heavy spray here and there we were all drenched and almost choked with the combination of smoke and water.

Jeffrey was telling me to come along to the infirmary room. He was carrying Morse, and Talbert was leading Pauline.

In a few moments we were in the little room with the cot and the chart of the skeleton and Jeffrey had put Morse down on the bed. The poor boy's back was burned. Helen Haleck and Hans too were burned, and the left side of Lajoie's face was seared.

Someone said, "Anne, for heaven's sake, what has happened to you!" And I realized that blood was streaming down over the shoulders of my laboratory coat.

Jeffrey turned the ministrations of Morse over to Lajoie and came to me. There was nothing seriously wrong, he found. Flying glass must have cut the lobe of my ear, but I had bled a good deal and felt faint, so I sat on the edge of the cot while he applied iodine. Pauline was stretched out on the floor with her head in Talbert's lap, and Torgerson, Helen, and Walter were sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall, looking on the verge of shock. Jeffrey had bad burns on both wrists but he paid no attention to them and he and Lajoie turned their anxious attentions to Morse, who was unconscious on the bed. We were all wet from the hose, and shaken and miserable.

Fortunately in a few minutes two nurses came to help us. They had been summoned from the university infirmary three blocks away.

By that time we heard the sirens of the fire engines outside and very shortly firemen came running up the stairs and the situation was under better control.

Jeffrey went out of the room and returned shortly with poor Dr. Julian, who was almost beside himself with emotion but otherwise apparently unhurt.

I moved over and sat on the floor beside Helen and thought how uncomfortable we all were and how much too small the room was for an emergency. People came hurrying in, and two firemen with bad burns were brought in, protesting. The air was heavy with smoke and when the door was open a sense of disaster rushed in, encompassing us with the sounds of heavy feet running, of orders being shouted, of blows of axes on wood, and of gushing streams of water.

Finally Walter Dejon got to his feet and said, "Come on, Anne. I'm going to take you home. Is that okay, McNeill?"

"Good idea," Jeffrey said. "I don't know when I can get home, Anne." He was finally doing something to poor Lajoie's burned left cheek.

So Walter and I went out into the corridor and down the long stairs across huge pythons of hose and finally out and through crowds of people watching. Luckily it wasn't far to the parked car.

I should have preferred to have him drive faster up Woolsey Avenue, but realized that perhaps he was too much upset to trust himself. Certainly I didn't expect or want to have him begin to talk as he did.

He said, "Anne, I have the most damnable sense of approaching disaster–an ominous, ravenous sort of blackness coming, ready to pounce down and engulf us."

"It's only reaction from the fire," I said. "Go home and have Cynthia make you some strong coffee."

"She'll be at one of her war work parties," he said. "She won't be home."

I didn't ask him to stop off at our house. I felt I couldn't bear to talk to him for five more minutes.

He said, "I've been all sorts of a fool. In fact, looking back over my life, I don't think I've ever been anything but a fool, and perhaps especially lately. If only it were not always this eternal pressure for money and money and more money. God, it drives me nuts sometimes. Why couldn't it have been you I married? Why does Jeffrey have to have all the luck?"

We were in front of our house and he stopped and put his arms around me and kissed me. He murmured, with his lips close to my ear, fortunately the one that had not been cut by glass, "You'll stand up for me, Anne, won't you? You won't chuck me over to the sharks?"

It is difficult to maintain freedom of action in the front seat of a car, but I managed to disengage myself.

I said, "Walter, we've had enough sensationalism today. Go home and make yourself some coffee and get to bed."

I got out of the car and went up to the house and Michael and Mary met me, Mary exclaiming, "By the saints, Mrs. McNeill! Whatever has been threatening the life of you now?"

By half past four I woke, sat up in bed, and called for Mary and Michael. They came up with tea and hot buttered toast and cheese and strawberry jam. Michael sat on the end of my bed and shared my repast and Mary stood by the door, ejaculating at intervals, "Now what do you know about that!" when I told her at greater length about the fire. When I had first come back I had been too exhausted to talk or even to eat. But I couldn't stay at home in ease now, for Jeffrey hadn't appeared, nor had he telephoned. I asked Mary to make some sandwiches for him and put coffee in a thermos bottle. Then I got up and dressed and went out to get my car from the garage.

By now the heaviness of the morning had somewhat lifted. There was a slight breeze and the sun was coming out.

When I reached the chemical laboratories the crowd and the hose were gone and only one fire engine was parked across the street. Inside and upstairs a policeman was guarding the entrance to the unit corridor and I had some trouble persuading him to let me go through. Walter happened to come out of one of the small laboratories, saw me there, and vouched for me. We went down the corridor amidst wreckage and the smells of wet, burned wood and smoke and acids. I put Jeffrey's sandwiches and coffee in my office.

I said to Walter, "So you didn't go home and go to bed after all."

"Yes, I did," he said. "I ate a lonely crust and had a good drink and an hour's sleep and then came back. But whatever happened to Jeffrey, Anne?"

"What did happen to him? Isn't he here?" I was frightened.

"He's here all right. Very much here. But what happened to him when he went home for lunch?"

"Why? I don't understand." I didn't want to tell Walter that Jeffrey had not been home at all.

"Since he got back he's been going around asking everybody the color of their bathing suits."

"Has he been doing that?" I asked.

"He has; without preamble or explanation. 'Walter, what is the color of your bathing suit?' " He imitated Jeffrey's curt manner of questioning.

" 'Maroon, McNeill—maroon. . . . No others. Did you want to borrow one?'

" 'Have you a green-and-white one?'

" 'No, my dear fellow, only a maroon one.' . . . Anne, I cross my heart I give you our actual dialogue. And then if he didn't go off down the hall and waylay first Talbert and ask him the same thing and then Torgerson. And after a few minutes I heard him going on in the identical eccentric manner with Lajoie. I can tell you it really got them all sore. This is not the time to introduce a motif of bathing suits."

I said I was sorry, but Jeffrey was always unpredictable and didn't believe in explanations.

We went to Dr. Julian's office then, where we found the members of the unit, except Tom Morse. Mr. Bard had, apparently, just arrived there. Various people nodded at me and Jeffrey came over and placed a stool for me. Dr. Julian was saying:

"We can't explain at all how the fire started. It seemed to originate in the explosion of an ether can toward the northeast end of the laboratory. We have always taken, of course, the most careful precautions against fire. No Bunsen burners are ever allowed in the large laboratory; no flame of any sort."

"Was anybody smoking?" Bard asked.

"By no means!" Dr. Julian assured him. "No one ever smoked there. I'm afraid it was one of these inexplicable accidents that never will be understood."

"Anybody here have any explanation?" Bard asked.

Nobody spoke.

"Where is Morse?" he asked.

"In the hospital, under strong sedatives," Jeffrey answered.

Dr. Julian said, "The loss is appalling, of course. But the laboratory and its normal equipment were well insured, and as to our special materials, I am not as distressed about those as I was at first. We had considerable uranium in flasks in water baths and that was not affected. Most of that in the jars is still unhurt. We had some in evaporating dishes and some of those dishes were lost, unfortunately, broken and so on, but not all. The uranium is not soluble in water so we may be able, by carefully gathering up the ashes, to recover some. A certain amount, I am afraid though, may have been washed down the drains. I suppose there must be catch basins somewhere between the floors. We might have those ripped out."

"We'll have to ask Washington what to do about that," Jeffrey said. "I think it would cause comment and publicity if we seemed to be working with so valuable a substance that we had to rip the whole chemistry building apart to recover it."

"I suppose you can check on exactly how much you did lose?" Bard asked.

"Certainly, by weight," Lajoie answered.

"Well, let's go in and look at the damage," Bard said.

We went across the hall, where two firemen, a policeman, and one of Mr. Bard's subordinates were on guard.

The room was a chaos of soaked, charred wood, of broken glass and melted, twisted pipes, and the odors of wet wood and smoke and chemical were almost suffocating. The floor was covered deeply with blackened fragments chopped off the walls and the benches by the firemen. Glass was mingled with this, and ashes and wire and odds and ends of twisted metal.

"Don't go in," Dr. Julian cautioned us. "Don't step on anything. We've got to go through all this for the lost X."

"None of your notes or records were lost?" Bard asked.

"No. They were all in the safe in my office," Julian answered him.

XVII

JEFFREY AND I went out, shortly, and he asked how I was feeling and I said, "Much better," and told him I had brought him something to eat and it was in my office.

"What is the point of the bathing suits?" I asked when he was established on the edge of the behemoth with sandwiches and coffee.

"A curious thing. When I was driving home for lunch I realized that the Julians must have a gardener so I drove around there and asked him about the rubber horse. At first he couldn't give me any satisfaction but then I placed the day by saying there had been a thunderstorm in the morning and he said that he did remember seeing a man and the Julian children playing in the pool with a rubber horse. Come to think of it, he'd never seen it before and he never saw it again. I put on some pressure to get details and he did think the man had on a green-and-white bathing suit. He said he was keeping his eye on the kids because they were never supposed to go in the pool without their nurse being right there. He supposed she was having tea in the house."

"Nobody in the unit had a green bathing suit?"

"Apparently not. Unless it were Tom Morse."

"Can you imagine Tom playing into Zunyer's hands?" I asked.

"I can't, unless his religious line is a front to hide something."

We considered this unlikely suggestion for a time and then Jeffrey went back to Dr. Julian and the others and I went down to the library and worked on the bibliography.

Surprisingly we were able to go home at a reasonable time, to have a peaceful dinner and read for almost an hour in the living room before the next disaster broke.

The telephone rang and Jeffrey answered it.

I knew something was very wrong the minute he came into the room.

"Morse has disappeared!" he said. "This is the worst development yet."

"Disappeared? From the hospital?"

"Yes, from his room in the hospital."

"But I thought he was to be guarded constantly by Bard's men."

"He was, as soon as he came out of the sedative. But nobody expected him to come out so soon. And Bard's man was to get there in ten minutes."

"Where was the nurse?"

"Down the hall, making up reports in the office. Morse apparently woke up and got up. When the nurse came back she found his bed empty and his clothes gone from the suitcase. He slipped out and downstairs without anybody seeing him. Now he's loose on the city and we'll have all hell to pay."

"But won't they catch him at once?" I asked. "Isn't he all bandaged?"

"He was chiefly burned on the back of his shoulders and legs. Still, I don't see how he managed to put his clothes on. This is really very bad, Anne. Who knows where he'll go and what he'll say? In his condition he's apt to stop everybody he meets and tell everything that we're doing in the unit. Think, if this news breaks out in the headlines tomorrow and sweeps the country!"

There was nothing to be said.

"Well, I'll get the car and go out around the streets hunting for him. We have all of Bard's men and the police force. Bard is notifying the taxicab stands and bus terminals. I told Bard to call here if he has anything to report, and I'll telephone back frequently. You stay here and take the messages."

He left then and I sat still and thought of what would happen if Morse did talk to listening crowds on the street corners. I could visualize him standing in the moonlight on a box, or on the steps of some building, uttering warnings of the evil work going on in the vineyard of Satan in the chemical laboratories of the university: "weapons from the arsenal of the Devil to wipe out the cities and reduce them to ruin . . . of wolves and desolation . . . uranium . . . the atomic bomb . . . I call upon you all to arise and destroy this menace to civilization. . . ." A crowd would gather, listening, incredulous at first, thinking him a crank of some sort and then beginning to believe and finally being convinced that this tormented young man calling to them from the night was speaking the truth.

And then think of the publicity! The reverberations all over the country and in Europe and Asia!

And think of what Washington would say and do to us!

I sat in my living room gripped in that chill, sickening sensation you have when you have made some mistake that is irreparable and of incredible magnitude.

The telephone rang and I answered it. Jeffrey was calling, asking if I had had any news.

Five minutes later Bard called with the same question, and after that Dr. Julian, and then, shortly, Lajoie. Finally I went in and sat by the telephone. I knew that it was hot in that small room but I was cold and shivering.

I thought, "I can't stand this waiting here. I shall get out my own car and go about myself, hunting for Morse."

As I went into the hall the doorbell rang. I answered it and there he was, Morse himself, pale as a man can be and scarcely able to stagger into the hall. I took his arm, helped him into the living room, and got him onto the couch, face down, so that he would not be lying on his burned back.

I called Mary, who had been sitting in the kitchen, glumly, worrying about all the telephoning and my obvious distress. She rushed off to make tea for Morse.

The telephone rang again and Jeffrey's voice said, "Any news?"

I said, "Yes, Tom is here in the living room. He seems in a pretty bad way. Come back as soon as you can."

He was with us in seven minutes, getting some tea down the poor boy, trying to calm his emotional tension.

"I had to see you, sir, I had to come to you. Though they held me in bondage, still the scorpions of my conscience drove me forth out of that damned hospital. This morning I drank of the flaming cup of hell and now I know what is in store for me——"

I said, "Don't think of it, Tom. You have led a good life. You will never be condemned to hell."

He sat up then and embarked on an excited, rambling condemnation of the part he had played in laboring in Satan's vineyard—and if that were not bad enough, this morning he had set fire to the laboratory.

"How did you do that?" Jeffrey asked.

"When you were all listening to Dr. Julian I knocked over an ether can—I had unscrewed the top—and dropped a lighted match in the ether. It was sin, unforgivable—but I felt then that I had to stop the work on the bomb, Dr. McNeill. I had to stop it. . . . My shoulders and my back do hurt unbearably."

"Stand it a few minutes more, Morse, and then I'll give you something to help it. Just one or two questions. Have you a green-and-white bathing suit?"

"Yes sir, green trunks and a white top. Sir, I can't tell you the weight of remorse that fell upon me when I saw what I had done to the laboratory——"

"Forget it now. That's past. On the day of the big thunderstorm in the morning, did you take a yellow rubber horse to the Julians' swimming pool?"

"Yes sir, I did that, to test it to see if it leaked, and it did leak, but the little boy and I fixed it up good."

"Did you buy this horse?"

"No sir, why should I want a rubber horse like that one?"

"Afterward did you give it to a small boy named Konrad Zunyer?"

"No sir, I don't know any Konrad Zunyer. . . . Please, Dr. McNeill, my back's driving me nearly crazy."

"Who did buy the horse then? To whom did it belong?"

"I can't tell you that, sir. That I can't tell. I took it to the pool in the afternoon and tried it out, and after the supper party broke up, when we knew Ames Auger was dead—well, after a while, then I went over and got the horse again; but who it belonged to I can't say because that would not be honorable, sir, because I promised I would never mention it, and upon the ungodly He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempests; this shall be their portion to drink."

He looked so ill then and was in such evident pain and went on talking in so wild and disjointed a manner that Jeffrey ran upstairs and came down with a hypodermic needle. He gave him an injection and in about ten minutes the poor boy had fallen asleep, lying face downward on our couch.

"Who do you think he was shielding?" Jeffrey asked.

"I don't know. I have been under the impression he was in love with Helen Haleck."

In five minutes Bard came. When we told him that Morse was safely in our living room he said, "Mrs. McNeill, let me come in and sit down. I'm nearly fainting with relief."

We put him on a chair in the hall and Jeffrey hurried off to fetch him whisky.

"I won't risk sending that boy to a hospital again," Bard said. "I'll put him in the spare room in my own house and have one of my men watch him every minute. I'll have them fly up two special nurses from Washington, and when he's well enough to be moved we'll take him off to a place we have where he'll be taken care of and not allowed to do any damage."

I said, "The poor boy, will he be locked up for years and years?"

"Don't worry about him. He'll not have too bad a time," Mr. Bard said. "McNeill, perhaps we'd better move him now while he's so far out. I'll get my man in from outside. He's waiting for me in the car."

They took poor Morse off and drove him away.

Then Jeffrey and I went down to the chemical laboratories again.

We found everyone else of the unit there working in the great burned room, gathering up all the ashes and the charred wood and putting them in ash cans to be saved and processed later for the recovery of the lost uranium.

I suppose it was reaction after the fire, for although they were all exhausted and more or less burned I have never seen them in a gayer, more stimulated, almost elated mood, working like beavers, singing bits of songs, and telling funny stories. Helen Haleck kept a pot of very strong, rather bitter coffee on an electric flat in Dr. Julian's office. Fortified by this, we all worked there until after two o'clock in the morning.

It was almost three by the time we got home and got into bed. And I had to get the nine o'clock train to New York, for I was lunching with Walter Dejon's unknown cousin at one.

XVIII

JUST AS I WAS LEAVING the house to get the nine o'clock for New York, Michael ran up, hugged me about the knees, and gave me a box of his crayons to amuse me on the train.

Mary said, "Don't take them, ma'am. I never seen anything like them for coming off onto everything. It's a hot day and they'll get over everything in your purse."

However, I didn't want to disappoint Michael, so I took them, kissed him, and went off. Jeffrey was taking me down to the station.

I bought my ticket and the paper, got the train in good time, and found a seat in an air-conditioned car with a young woman of about my own age. She had an overnight bag on the floor in front of her feet and a suitcase in the rack overhead.

There were no stops between our station and the Grand Central.

I read my paper for about fifteen minutes and then thought I would relax and rest. Possibly I might get a little sleep.

About five seats ahead of me a woman put her ungloved hand up to tilt her hat slightly forward. I recognized that little hat with the three red cherries; the black hair drawn into a demure knot at the back of the head as one's grandmother wore her hair. I recognized the shape of the hand, the too long, dark red talon nails, and the diamond and ruby ring I had left on Zunyer's table five nights before.

The woman was Cynthia Dejon, and I thought, "Of course, at the back of my mind I have known all week that it must have been she who was the link." How maliciously amused she must have been when she convinced Zunyer that I was ready to sell out Jeffrey and the unit. Perhaps she had even forged a note to him, signing my name, promising the red wine he wanted. I suppose she had known him during her dancing career in New York. She must have shown Pierre the chemistry building roof and the gutter. Perhaps she bored the hole in the common-room wall.

The thought came to me that she might be going in town to meet Zunyer and talk over the latest occurrences in the unit. Perhaps she had been able to get some important information out of Walter. That might explain his mood of yesterday when he took me home: his remorse, his fear of the future, his remarks about the pressure in regard to money. She should certainly be followed by the F.B.I. when she reached the city, but how was I to get in touch with them or Jeffrey, since the train did not stop at all?

I got up, went back through the car and into the next one, where the conductor was taking tickets. Standing in the swaying aisle, I said, "I am Mrs. Jeffrey McNeill. My husband and I are associated at present with the F.B.I. and it is necessary that I send a telegram to the office in New York at the next station. Would it be possible to halt the train for a moment? It's a very urgent matter."

He regarded me with suspicion and demanded papers substantiating my claim.

I had a card and my driver's license, which gave my name, but I had nothing else.

He looked at me with distaste, said, "Sorry, madam, but I can't stop the train for everybody," and went on taking tickets.

I thought, "Then I'll have to follow her myself," and went back to the seat. I had had an idea about how I could make up my face so that I might not be easily recognized. But how about my clothes?

The girl beside me was reading a mystery story in a magazine, a fortunate circumstance for me.

I said to her, "Excuse me—I wonder if you would consider helping me out in a rather curious situation?"

She looked up, startled and on the defensive.

"The point is," I said, "that I am a private detective. I am working on a certain case and I have suddenly found out that a woman whom I have to follow is sitting in a seat ahead of me. If she sees me she will recognize me, and it is essential that I change my dress and in some way disguise myself."

The girl's mouth opened in astonishment, but she looked less antagonistic.

"It is a most urgent matter," I assured her. "Would you have in your bag any dress that I could buy? I'll pay you enough so you can go straight to one of the good stores on Fifth Avenue and replace it."

She said, "Say, are you kidding me?"

"I'm not kidding you. This is the truth."

She looked at me and perhaps my expression convinced her. Then she began to giggle. She opened her overnight bag, rooted around under a pair of pink pajamas, and partly drew out a green print rayon dress, rather awful, but perhaps the worse the better under the circumstances.

"How about this?" she said. "Do you think it would fit? It's a little large for me."

I said we seemed to be about the same size and that if she didn't mind I would take it into the ladies' room and try it on. If it was all right I would give her twenty-five dollars for it, as well as the dress I had on.

She said, oh gosh, that'd be swell, and what do you know about this? She'd always wanted to have something exciting happen to her. Here was a scarf that went with it; would I want that too?

So I took the dress and scarf and went back to the lavatory and took off my dark blue dress and put on the green thing, with difficulty and reluctance.

It fitted well enough but had, obviously, been bought in some cheap ladies' department of a third-rate store.

Then I took Michael's crayons out of my bag and proceeded to use them as make-up, achieving a smooth and enviable sun tan over my face and hands and neck. I darkened my eyebrows considerably, took my lipstick, and put rosebud lips on my face. Regarding the creature in the mirror, I laughed and wound the green print scarf around my head as a turban.

I was certainly not myself.

The girl's mouth opened in amazement when I went back to the seat. She accepted the twenty-five dollars and stuffed my dress in her bag. I was certainly sorry to see it go, for it was one of my favorites, well cut and expensive and becoming.

"Golly," she said, "golly. I would never have thought you could look like that! I wouldn't have known you!" But she seemed nervous and a little afraid of me and shortly she murmured some excuse about a girl friend in the car behind, stood up, got down her suitcase from the rack, and staggered with it and the overnight bag down the aisle and away through the door.

After that I put my head back and watched Cynthia's hat and watched her hand with its ruby and diamond ring come up now and then to pat her hair or move the hat or tighten the small red earring in her left ear.

Before long a sailor boy coming through the car asked if the seat beside me were taken. I said it was not but I did not move over beside the window. He apologized for pushing past me, sat down, looked at some comics for a few minutes, and went off to sleep.

I had been thinking, "If I could do something about my hair the disguise would be perfect. If I could only do something about my hair!" Whereupon the idea came.

In my purse I always carry a small flat penknife. I took this out, opened it, and carefully and stealthily, not to wake the sleeping boy, made a rip in the blue plush of the car seat. I hated this act of vandalism, but in this case the end justified the means. As I had hoped there was a gray horsehair stuffing. I pulled out a handful of this, tucked it away into my purse, and was pulling another out when the sailor's hand grabbed my wrist in a grip that hurt and his indignant voice said:

"Say, lady, I don't know what you're up to, but I'm surely going to turn you over to the conductor the minute he comes through!"

That conductor who had already regarded me with such dislike and distrust!

I said, "Look here, please—just stop a second. I'll explain to you. I am Mrs. Jeffrey McNeill. I am a private detective. Since I got on this train I have seen a woman whom it is most urgent that I follow, and I have had to disguise myself. Now I shall have to ask you to help me out in this. When we get to New York, will you please go straight to a telephone and call my husband and tell him this?" I took one of my cards from my purse and wrote on it our telephone number and the message, "Cynthia Dejon is the link we have been looking for. I am following her. Try to get the F.B.I. to trace us. I am wearing a green print dress and similar scarf turban and have gray hair and sun-tan make-up. I don't know where we will be."

I handed this to the boy and said, "Please. This is a matter of great importance to the war effort."

He said, "Lady, you can't take me in with any stuff like that. Here comes the conductor now."

I fairly held my breath as the man came toward us. The sailor held my card in his fingers. He looked at it, at me, and at the conductor and then at me again—and he let the conductor pass.

He said, "Okay, lady. You win. I'll do it."

I thanked him and got up and went down the aisle again. When I came back gray curly hair showed across my forehead and a little over my ears, coming out from under the turban.

The sailor boy had left my seat, and the rest of the way into the Grand Central I sat alone and watched Cynthia's head and her hand with its ring.

When we reached the terminal she stood up and looked back through the car. Her eyes did not rest on me, nor would she, I felt sure, have known me. I followed her off the train and up the ramp into the station.

I had hoped that Zunyer might be waiting for her, but no one was there to meet her.

There is no use in taking time to describe the extremely trying hour and a half that I lived through then. I followed her over to Fifth Avenue and into shop after shop. She bought gloves and veils and handkerchiefs, and I, hovering in the distance, had to make various small purchases too, and once or twice was obliged to leave unceremoniously, to the indignation of the salesgirls. She bought shoes and a hat and I suffered, trying to be inconspicuous and to offer some reason for lingering in the shoe and hat departments too. Once I thought she looked at me with suspicion and I resisted the temptation to fade away with haste. I kept as far from her as possible, among groups of other people. I nearly lost her when she went out of Best's side door and again when she was crossing Madison Avenue. Eventually she went to the Lexington Avenue subway and took a train to Brooklyn. I went in the next car and stood on the platform between cars where I could watch her and she might not notice me. She got off at the station nearest Brooklyn Heights, walked a few blocks through that old and still charming part of the city, and went into a hotel.

In the lobby a man came forward to meet her. He was Zunyer.

I stepped into a telephone booth and called the F.B.I. office in New York. I said, "This is Mrs. Jeffrey McNeill. I am at the Hotel Admiral in Brooklyn. The man whom we want, Zunyer, is here with Mrs. Walter Dejon. Please send two men around at once." I gave a quick description of Zunyer and Cynthia and of my present appearance.

I had lost sight of Cynthia and Zunyer. Then I saw them getting into an elevator. I wondered if he had a room here and if she were going up to it, and what I should do now.

The voice in the telephone receiver was assuring me that somebody would be right over, all I had to do was to keep my eye on those two, and I said, "They've just gone up in an elevator. I'm afraid I'll never find them now."

"Try the dining room," the voice said. "Look, Mrs. McNeill. You hurry up there. We'll send some men over and I'll call the hotel office and have them put the house detectives on it right away."

I took the elevator up to the dining room on the roof and stood a moment in the doorway looking about. Then I saw them, at a table by a window at the far end of the room.

The headwaiter came up and asked if I were expecting to meet someone and I said I was but that my friend might be late and I would sit at my table and have an old-fashioned without waiting for her. He took me to a table rather nearer Zunyer's than I liked, but I sat with my back to them and hoped I would not be recognized. I took a small mirror out of my bag and, pretending to make up my lips, I got the reflection of Zunyer and saw him studying the menu, and saw Cynthia lean toward him, talking with animation, telling him perhaps of the fire in the laboratory, or possibly of Pierre's death.

There was a cool wind from the harbor and it was pleasant to sit here looking out over the approach to New York and to watch the shipping.

"A good place for Zunyer to come, too," I thought, "for him to be watching the shipping," and I felt more and more nervous about him and anxious that those men should appear and take over this responsibility.

I ordered lunch and started eating. It seemed a long time since I had telephoned and I wondered what could have delayed the men from the F.B.I. Nor did I see anyone who might be a house detective. It would be intolerable if anything should go wrong now.

Then something did go wrong. I don't know what it was that made them suspect me. I took a quick glance in the little mirror and saw them looking at me, and then they got up. Zunyer took some money out of his pocket and put it on the table. Then the two hurried across the room.

I thought desperately, "What can I do to stop them? Shall I scream? Shall I run after them?" and I also dropped some bills on the table and hurried out.

The headwaiter had stopped Zunyer and was asking him if anything was the matter—was the lady dissatisfied with the food or the service? This moment's delay enabled me to catch up with them as they were standing by the elevator, and then, to the consternation of us all, we found ourselves, with no one else but the elevator boy, going down alone together.

I was frightened and thankful beyond words for the presence of the elevator boy.

It seemed too foolish to pretend that we didn't know each other, so I said, "How do you do, Mr. Zunyer, how is Konrad?"

Cynthia was in terror.

Zunyer said, "Ah—Mrs. McNeill—however one is dressed, one is still Sancho Panza."

I said, "I see that the ring is again offered as payment for the good red wine. We are returning your clips and the two thousand dollars to the government."

"Your sense of honor must be sometimes a handicap to your finances, Mrs. McNeill," Zunyer said. "As for the ring, I mailed it to Mrs. Dejon, since you so obviously did not care for it."

I looked at Cynthia and said, "I am glad to have found John Hutardo's cat."

Zunyer smiled then. He said, "Mrs. McNeill, what a Spanish lady you would have made!"

We stopped at a floor and took on three other women.

"How is Konrad?" I asked.

He looked worried and sad. "Not too well," he said. "His nervousness troubles me."

"If you lived a more normal life," I told him, "the boy would be strong and well."

That hurt him. He said, "Ah, Mrs. McNeill. We are all as God made us and frequently much worse."

"So it was you, Cynthia, who had the rubber horse?" I said.

I think she would have struck me if it had not been for the elevator boy and the three other women. She answered sulkily, "I don't know what you are talking about."

But Zunyer said, as if he were tired and disheartened, "This eternal lying is wearisome. She gave the rubber horse to Konrad. And now, Mrs. McNeill, what do you propose to do next?"

That was a question which had been worrying me. I couldn't hold them by force. As far as I could see I should simply have to "make a scene" and demand the house detective and denounce Zunyer in the hotel lobby.

I told him, "I think you are the one, Mr. Zunyer, who will have to be worrying about what to do next."

But the red number above the elevator door was changing from three to two.

"I have no need at all to worry," he replied. "I am a citizen of a neutral country, which is Spain. Moreover, I have another good jacket in France."

"France is far away today," I answered, "and so is Spain."

The red number changed to one, and the elevator stopped.

I thought, "Shall I grab his arm and call out, demanding the house detective?"

We went out of the sliding door together and there were three determined-looking men waiting. One of them said, "Mrs. McNeill, are these Zunyer and Mrs. Dejon?"

I said that they were and the men closed in. "We'll take over now," I was told, and in two minutes more I was watching them marshaling Cynthia's trim, indignant figure and Zunyer's discouraged fat one through the revolving door out to the street.

XIX

It was not until I got off the train and saw Jeffrey waiting for me on the platform that I remembered Walter Dejon's cousin. And now it was half past four in the afternoon!

I had telephoned Jeffrey after Zunyer and Cynthia had been taken away. He had been greatly relieved to talk with me, for he had had an incomprehensible telephone call from an unknown sailor. After explaining the sailor and telling Jeffrey briefly about Zunyer and Cynthia I had told him what train I expected to take home. After that I had spent twenty minutes removing my make-up, then returned to New York and bought myself a suitable dress and hat.

And all that time the unfortunate Geraldine Dejon had been sitting in the club waiting for me, growing hungrier and hungrier and more and more angry, and I never did turn up at all.

"Darling!" I said to Jeffrey when we met, "I've done the most dreadful thing! I forgot entirely about Walter Dejon's cousin."

It took him a moment to think who she was. He said, "Oh—well, I'll telephone her then. I suppose she can tell us what we want to know, over the telephone. . . . Now tell me exactly what happened about Zunyer and Cynthia. Certainly, Anne, that was a superb job you did."

Naturally pleased, I gave him a more detailed account of that adventure.

We went downstairs, through the tunnel, and into the station, where I waited while he telephoned that Yonkers number. I watched him and wondered what he was saying. He leaned against the wall of the booth, obviously trying to placate a very much annoyed lady. Finally he came out, hot and harried.

He said, "Well, I managed to calm her down and did get something out of her. She said that she and Walter went to Germany years ago, in 1933, on one of those student trips, and that he had been influenced by the glamor of the ideology. But it had just been one of those young enthusiasms, never anything in it, really. She regretted ever mentioning it to Ames Auger, for she was afraid he had made a lot of it. Walter was a fine boy—just impulsive and a little immature."

"Still, an enthusiasm for the Nazi ideology would look pretty serious to the F.B.I.," I said.

"It would, particularly since Walter failed to mention any such indiscretion on his papers."

"And if Ames Auger were blackmailing him—there is your motive."

We went out of the station and crossed the street to our parked car.

Jeffrey said, "That's true—and Cynthia was the link with Zunyer. But nevertheless we haven't one shred of evidence that Dejon murdered Ames. Look, Anne, has it occurred to you that perhaps we have entirely the wrong explanation for that murder?"

I said, "No, it never has."

He started the car and drove through the streets and turned left through the city instead of going on out Woolsey Avenue.

"I want to go to the laboratories before going home," he explained. "Michael is perfectly all right."

"How about Morse?"

"Rather a high fever, Bard said, but not alarming. Now here's a new theory, Anne. What do you think of this?"

This was it. Perhaps Ames had not discovered that someone else in the unit was ready to sell its secrets to Zunyer. Perhaps he had not threatened to expose anyone to the F.B.I. Perhaps he himself was planning with Cynthia to sell his process to Zunyer. Someone in the unit may have found this out and, to prevent such treachery, killed him, removing the pages from the notebook and writing that suicide note in order to have Ames's death appear to be a suicide.

We parked in front of the chemical laboratories and I said, "Jeffrey, that is very plausible. Have you any idea who might have done it?"

"No, we'll have to get our evidence first. We'll follow Pauline's suggestion and compare the style of the suicide note with the literary style of everybody in the unit. Reprints of all their papers are kept in filing boxes in Julian's office. We'll go straight there."

Two of Bard's men were on guard in the corridor but today, after the fire, no members of the unit were around. I suppose they had all gone home, exhausted, to sleep.

We went in Dr. Julian's office, locked the door, and unlocked the safe. Jeffrey had duplicates of all Dr. Julian's keys. We first read the suicide note.

"The only very distinctive thing in it," I said, "is that reference to a demon. But, Jeffrey, taking that and your theory together, I could tell you now who was responsible for Auger's death. I have the complete psychological evidence."

"We need something more tangible than psychological evidence. . . . Here's a pile of reprints for you and I'll look over these."

We sat on the floor surrounded by filing cases and pamphlets. I didn't keep track of the number of reprints we studied. There were a great many. We found, as Pauline had said, that everyone had a definite literary style and that Ames Auger's was not at all that of the suicide note.

Jeffrey was reading a paper entitled: *Study of the Dielectric Lost Factors in Solutions of Polymers.* He put this down and took up another, *The Kinetics of Reactions in Non-Aqueous Solvents.*

He said, "The same person wrote these two and in them you find a phrase recurring that is used in the suicide note: 'relative to'—'our research relative to X.' It's a rather awkward phrase and not too usual. I haven't found it in any of the others' papers. Now although we certainly couldn't convict anyone on that, it gives me a foundation to work from. I'll look at a notebook or two now."

I said, "Who wrote these two papers, Jeffrey?"

But he wouldn't tell me, in fact he was so absorbed I doubt if he heard my question, but I was annoyed.

We took notebooks from the safe and put those on the floor beside us. We had been working for two hours when he started on the notebooks. Jeffrey was not willing to confine our examinations to those of one person, so he looked with great care through those of the other members of the unit. I didn't do this because I would have had no idea what was suspicious and what was not. I put the reprints away, with the exception of the two he needed for proof.

I telephoned home to tell Mary that we didn't know when we would be back for dinner and then I sat down in Dr. Julian's chair, put my head on his desk, and nearly fell asleep.

Jeffrey said, "I say, Anne, 232 is the molecular weight of a barbiturate. . . . Look! I think I've found something here."

I got up and looked over his shoulder. Scribbled on the back page of one of the notebooks was this:

$$\begin{gathered}
160 + 157 \text{ (Na)} \\
+ 109 \text{ (Repeat)} \\
\text{Condense with } 60 = 264 + 60 - 2 \times 46 = 232 \\
80\% \text{ yield.}
\end{gathered}$$

I said, "What is it, Jeffrey?" still rather irritated at him.

"The calculation for a synthesis of a barbiturate. There is no reason in the world—except the reason we know—for this to be here. This calculation was worked out before making up the lethal dose of phenobarbital."

"But have you enough proof now," I asked, "with just the papers and this calculation?"

"I'd like to get something more conclusive. I wish I could find the scissors that cut the missing pages. We'll get out Ames's notebook and put all the others, with the exception of this one, with the barbiturate synthesis, back into the safe. Then we'll hunt around."

We did this, going through the smaller rooms and laboratories, looking through lockers, drawers, and desks. Finally, in a certain desk in the top right-hand drawer among pens and pencils and paper clips, Jeffrey found a small gold knife. He held it in his hand, looked at it and opened the first two blades, closed those and then opened a little scissors.

I remembered where I had seen that knife before.

Jeffrey took Ames Auger's notebook from me, clipped out an empty page, and compared its edges with the cut edges of the missing pages.

"Were they cut out with those scissors?" I asked.

He said, "Yes, in each case there is a very slight curve of the line."

I said, "Jeffrey, on the night of Walter's birthday party Dr. Julian took that knife out of his pocket and cut the thorns off a rose for me."

He said, "Well, come along, there's no use in putting it off."

The Julians were having coffee in the living room. I was aware that Mrs. Julian was asking us to sit down, saying she hoped there would be more coffee for us in the kitchen, but she was awfully afraid it had all been used, she would ring the bell for the maid and see. Dr. Julian was saying, "Well, Joan, I hope you have suffered no ill effects from our excitements of last night. I came home at one and slept all afternoon."

Jeffrey said, "May I talk with you, sir, for a few minutes in your library?"

From where we sat in his library I looked out through the open window upon the lawn and the pool and across through bushes to the Dejons' house, and I thought I saw between the bushes two or three people lying out in long chairs as if they were enjoying the evening. I thought that Walter would not suffer too much at having Cynthia taken from him by the government. I thought he would be a new man and a more successful and happy and able man without her demanding personality.

Jeffrey was talking to Dr. Julian, explaining our investigations at the laboratory, showing the calculation for the synthesis of a barbiturate, showing how the page we had cut out corresponded with the edges in Ames Auger's notebook. Then he took the small gold knife from his pocket and said, "Those pages were cut with the scissors in this, Dr. Julian."

He said, "Bless my soul, this is disturbing. Anne, my dear child, I know what you are thinking. On the evening of Ames's death I took that knife out of my pocket and cut thorns off a rose stem, didn't I?"

I said, "You did, Dr. Julian."

"I know. Let me tell you. That afternoon of Ames's death Lajoie went to the university library to look up some rare German references. He came back to the laboratory late. It was after six when I heard him in his office across the hall. I was just locking the safe. I had been bothered by a hangnail all afternoon. I called out and asked Lajoie if he would lend me his knife for a moment. I knew it had these scissors." He opened them and pressed their points against the palm of his hand. "Lajoie came in and gave me his knife and then went on into the big laboratory. I cut the hangnail but tore the skin slightly and drew a little blood. I am always somewhat afraid of our X dust so I went into the lavatory to wash carefully and put on iodine and when I came out to give the knife to Lajoie he had apparently forgotten about it and gone. So I took it home with me and returned it to him at Walter's party. . . . That is the story of the knife."

"That clears it up," Jeffrey said. "It was in Lajoie's notebook that we found the calculation for the synthesis of a barbiturate; and it was in his reprints that we found the recurring phrase 'relative to,' as used in the suicide note. No one else in the unit ever used that phrase."

"Dear me," Dr. Julian said with distress. "This revelation is a bomb in our unit. Are you sure you are right, Jeffrey, my boy?"

"Yes, sure," he answered. "We'll go around and see him now."

The houseman ushered us out into the garden where Lajoie was lying in a long chair smoking, listening to records of Mozart's Concerto in D minor. He rose and came to greet us with his pleasant cordiality.

We stood near the pool where the bronze figure dipped her feet in water, and Jeffrey said, "Dr. Lajoie, is this your gold knife?"

"It is, McNeill. Thanks. Where did you find it?" he said.

"In your desk drawer. You cut out the missing pages from Auger's notebook with these scissors?"

There was a pause. Lajoie looked at Jeffrey, then slowly looked about his garden as if taking leave of it and of the peace it held. He turned to Jeffrey again and said, "Yes, I cut out the pages with that knife."

"And on the day of Auger's death, at lunch, you dropped benzedrine and a lethal dose of phenobarbital into his chowder?"

"I did indeed."

"And late that afternoon, about half past five, you went to his room, found him dead, left a bottle of phenobarbital tablets on the table by his bed, and typed that suicide note?"

"You seem to know the whole thing. I'm rather glad, McNeill, that you have found out. It has been a heavy and unhappy weight to bear."

Jeffrey said, "Why did you kill him, Dr. Lajoie?"

He said, "I discovered that Auger was a traitor, that he and Cynthia were planning to sell the secrets of the unit. Won't you all sit down, please, while I explain."

We sat there, and I thought I had known few such lovely or such sorrowful evenings. There was a soft after-sunset glow in the garden, and a thrush sang in the bushes while Lajoie told what he had done and why.

It seems that he had gone to Auger's room one afternoon late, after Auger had left the laboratory. Lajoie had wanted to find out the name of a special reprint Auger had mentioned. He was anxious to read it that night. So he went to the lodging house and up the stairs of the side entrance and at the top, just before knocking on the door, he had heard Ames say, "You think he'll give us a good price then? I won't sell out my new process for anything but the top price."

Then Cynthia Dejon's voice had said, "He'll pay plenty. Don't worry about that, my dear boy. I used to know him in New York and he's rolling. . . . Tell me, does anyone else know this process of yours?"

"The original idea was Torgerson's, but I've developed it out of sight beyond his conception. Maybe McNeill knows something about it. He seems to know everything that goes on in the unit."

"And what Jeffrey knows, Anne knows too."

"That's about it," Ames had said, and they had both laughed. They had talked a little more about the process and the selling of it, but they had not mentioned any names. Then Cynthia had said she had to go and get dear Walter's supper, and Lajoie had hurried quietly down the stairs and out to his car.

"I came home," he said, "and thought it over, carefully. I realized, as anyone would, that to allow a man to live who had such rotten moral fiber as Ames was to jeopardize the whole atomic bomb project. Ames was a traitor and had to die. I considered telling you, McNeill, but it was such an unpleasant situation I thought it kinder to handle it myself. Frankly I didn't want Bard in on it at all. I didn't want our unit to get 'a black eye' in Washington and with the F.B.I. So I planned this painless mode of execution and carried it out."

"I see," Jeffrey said. "How about Auger's missing pages?"

"I cut those out early in the afternoon of the day he died. I have the keys to the safe and I went in to Dr. Julian's office when he was busy in the big laboratory. I burned the pages, by the way."

Dr. Julian groaned. He said, "Oh, my dear man—if only you hadn't done that!"

"I memorized them first," Lajoie said, and smiled.

We sat and looked at him and I thought, "He has the upper hand! How clever of him." And I was not sorry, for I liked Dr. Lajoie.

He said, "Now I might very well hold out on you and bargain, what price my life? I might say, 'I'll shell out that information in exchange for my immunity.' "

"You might do that, of course," Jeffrey said.

"But I don't think I will. I think I'll say, 'Do what you think best, McNeill!' I know that if you could get a pardon for me Torgerson and I could do some work along these lines that might have importance. Of course I don't know how good the process of Auger's is, but it might be worth a good many millions to the government —if nothing more."

"That's true. That's perfectly true!" Dr. Julian said in excitement.

"And I am not a habitual killer," Lajoie said. "There was Cynthia. I said to myself that if Ames had to die, how about Cynthia? But after all she didn't know a thing about what the unit was doing. I knew that from the way she talked to Ames the afternoon I overheard them. She has the brain of a rather dull bird. I was sure Walter was sound and I didn't think that with Ames eliminated there was any other way Cynthia could get information. However, it did worry me to have her around loose so I took to going over there a good deal and keeping pretty close watch on what she said and did. Now, my good judges, what is to be done with me?"

Dr. Julian said, "I think he should be allowed to continue his work with the unit. The work is greater than the life and death of any individual. The work is greater even than the law."

"I think Dr. Lajoie should be allowed to go on," I said.

"I agree," Jeffrey said, and got up. "You should, though, have reported it to the F.B.I., Lajoie. I shall have to tell this to Bard and to the authorities in Washington. I can't promise anything, of course."

Lajoie said simply, "I should naturally prefer to be allowed to go on as I am," and looked about his garden again.

We got up to go and drove back to Dr. Julian's. We telephoned Bard, who came up immediately, and Jeffrey told him the whole story. Bard was very angry at first and determined to rush off and take Lajoie into custody at once.

"But it's murder, it's downright murder," Bard insisted. "Can we let the man get away with that?"

Jeffrey said, "We can't have this case come to trial. We cannot have one word of publicity."

And I said, "I don't think it is murder any more than Jeffrey's shooting Pierre on the roof was murder. Both Lajoie and Jeffrey killed a man in order to protect the secrecy of the work."

In considering this we all talked for almost an hour more. Then Jeffrey called one of the top men in Washington and without using any names explained the situation to him. The question was whether or not to allow Lajoie to live in freedom and continue his usefulness to the unit.

"All right," Jeffrey said into the receiver. "Thanks, all right, that is what I thought. Then we'll do it." He hung up and turned toward us. He said, "We're to let him go on. He was executing justice as he saw it. Under ordinary circumstances he would certainly have to stand trial, but these are extraordinary circumstances and the importance of this project is, as Dr. Julian said, above the importance of the individual or the law."

2 P ~~4/1.00~~

5/100

6

MURDER
STRIKES
AN
ATOMIC
UNIT

Theodora
Du BOIS

THE
CRIME
CLUB